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BY EVELYN BOND

AUTHOR OF EVIL IN THE HOUSE

LADY OF STORM HOUSE

SHE WAS WARNED, THEN ORDERED AWAY FROM THAT EERIE, SINISTER MANSION—BUT IT HELD HER ONLY HOPE FOR A SUCCESSFUL CAREER AND NEW ROMANCE

GIRL VS. EVIL

Kay Campbell was invited to Storm House under mysterious circumstances—and, on her arrival, ordered away from it in a manner that was as sinister as it was inexplicable.

Who was the mysterious Rolf Storm, and why did he remain hidden in the locked, impregnable Red Room?

What savagely dreadful force menaced the young boy, Wink, and how could Kay fight against it?

What other strange secrets did the mansion shelter? Should Kay try to uncover them, or was it better to leave them buried in the dust of the past?

And what of her own romance, which appeared to be another victim of Storm House's evil? And what, finally, of her own life? . . .

LADY OF STORM HOUSE

Evelyn Bond

AN AUTHENTIC LANCER GOTHIC—ROMANCE

A LANCER BOOK • 1965

This is for
Meta and Bennett Karmin

Note: The characters in this book are fictitious, and any resemblance to persons living or dead is coincidental.

LADY OF STORM HOUSE

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Part One
OPEN THE DOOR AND HERE ARE THE PEOPLE

One

STORM HOUSE, they say, is still alive. It has always been a temperamental structure, according to the local residents, and it shows its feelings to this day. When it dislikes somebody, for instance, that person finds the floors creaking underfoot and gets wooden splinters on a hand from touching any of the metallic doorknobs. A certain famous movie actress once visited Storm House with her fifth or sixth husband, the local people claim, and was nearly scarred for life when a window was smashed near her from the outside. The incident is supposed to have happened at four o'clock on a sunlit afternoon, and no human being was close enough to have done that particular piece of damage. The story goes that the actress and her husband were not permitted to stay overnight, as they had planned on doing. Storm House had taken their measure and had rejected them.

None of the local people were surprised. Storm House, after all, had been an object of awe to them and their families from Civil War days onwards. Rudolph Arlington Storm, a secret Southern sympathizer, had been struck dead by a crossbeam while he was sitting by the fireplace and writing a letter offering his undercover services to the South.

Malvina Storm, Rudolph's wife, spunkily decided to scotch the rumors about Storm House once and for all. She moved herself, the two children and the servants out for a week and invited Hezekiah Hopkins to spend a week in the house as caretaker. If Storm House was

indeed an implement of supernatural rectitude it would reject Hezekiah instantly. He was the town's miser as well as being, of course, its wealthiest man. His vices were as unattractive as Hezekiah himself, which was saying a great deal.

He did emerge from his stay to insist that the house was harmless, as Malvina had anticipated; but it was said later on that he'd been white to the lips when he reached town again, and it wasn't long afterwards that he developed palsy. A number of people insisted that Hezekiah had acquired the disease from fear after having spent seven days and nights at Storm House.

The place was burned to the ground not too many years later, and there were those who claimed that Malvina Storm herself had set the fire so as to build a new house with no strange reputation from the past. The new structure, in fact, was put up in a different location than the old house. One of the carpenters fell from the roof during its construction though, at a time when his stomach was filled with bad whiskey; and the rumors about the malevolent house started up once again. Malvina was supposed to have sighed and then resigned herself to living in what was considered a house of haunts and evil-eyed hobgoblins.

The second time that Storm House was destroyed by fire, the deed was supposed to have been perpetrated by the house itself. The house wanted to "punish" Bootsie Storm and her fellow flappers who were having a wild party with a number of shieks on a wintry evening in Nineteen Twenty-seven. Only five servants survived the night's accident, and none of them was ever again willing to talk about it afterwards, except in the most general terms.

In spite of what was called the supreme horror of unnatural intervention in the affairs of the living, Storm House's reputation began to fade shortly afterward. The passage of time helped to destroy fear. In a so-called age of science, there could be no such concept

as destruction by supernatural force. A hex couldn't kill; a ghost couldn't have any fatal influence; a house (of all things!) could take no dislike to some person and do him or her any harm. In the era of science, destruction came as a result of illness or violence, bottles or bombs. Destruction was man-made.

But how thrilling it'd be, as more than one local resident pointed out from time to time during the early years of the atomic age, if a house could and did destroy.

Any of the local residents who knew Kay Campbell would have added sincerely that nobody would ever want to see such a thing happen to the likes of her.

Kay said calmly, "I knew that you were going to ask me about it tonight."

"Well then?" Charles leaned forward. "It's a perfectly simple question that affects both of us and you can give me a one-word answer. Either you say yes or you say no. Either you're willing to marry me or you're not."

Charles smiled contentedly, having simplified matters to the greatest possible degree. He had often remarked to Kay that nothing succeeds like simplicity, and this single idea was a guiding principle of his life. When a moveable barrier was put on the road and in his path, Charles would push it to one side and continue with his driving. One night with Kay in a restaurant several months ago, when a waiter had forgotten to bring water glasses to their table and had promptly disappeared after laying out silverware for them, Charles stood up and went into the kitchen and came back with two filled glasses.

Now he sat on the sofa in Kay's carefully furnished apartment. His unpadded coat drooped at the shoulders because he was leaning forward. Lamplight caught his hair, gray at the temples where he refused

to dye it even though he looked older than his thirty-two years.

"We've been seeing each other for six months," he pointed out solemnly as if that one fact carried a vital meaning. "I've seen you on good days and bad, Kay. I've heard you talk about the children you teach and your problems with them. I know all about your family in North Dakota, and I suppose I'll be meeting them after you say yes."

Never take a girl for granted, Kay said silently to him. Especially after six months.

"And I know we get along well. We've never had an argument."

To him, of course, that would be an excellent omen. This girl was bound to be easy to live with.

"And you're not seeing anybody else," he said briskly. "Besides you're twenty-four, and that's an age when a girl should be getting married. Twenty-four is supposed to be the peak age for a woman as far as attractiveness is concerned, you know, Kay. After that, the statistics say that she goes downhill. Besides, this is an uncertain world and even a five-foot-two redhead with beautiful eyes and a good disposition can't always be sure she's going to be asked again if she wants to get married."

He was right, of course, Kay knew. But there had to be some way of admitting how right he was and pointing out as well that she couldn't possibly marry him. He happened to be a good-tempered, likeable man. He danced well. His career in banking was assured, heaven knew, as much as these things ever can be assured. But he treated people as if they were figures in a checkbook, and he could never accept the possibility that something might be wrong in the balance.

To tell him that she wouldn't marry him and do it without hurting his feelings was going to be a formidable problem.

Charles said triumphantly, "It makes sense, you see.

For the two of us to get married makes perfect sense, Kay. You have to admit that."

"I know you've been fond of me," she murmured. "Of course it's made me very happy to know that I'm liked, Charles, and especially by somebody I happen to like, myself."

"Then we're set." He grinned from ear to ear. "We've got a deal."

Kay couldn't allow him to think that she had agreed to marriage. "Charles, you have to let me get all my thoughts together."

"Sure, Kay, I know you're excited. My mother was saying I shouldn't ask you to marry me till we'd known each other for a lot longer, but I said, 'Ma, it's one of those things you can tell after six months: that you can get along with a girl. And if the same girl likes you, too, then you shouldn't let her get away.' That's exactly what I said. My mother said you'd never be as good a cook as she is, but I told her you'd learn. After all, my mother was a bride herself once upon a time."

"Charles, I hate to put it so bluntl—"

"What I've figured is this," he said, drawing a slip of paper out of a jacket pocket and setting it down on the glass-fronted cocktail table. With a ball pen he ticked off each point as he mentioned it. "I'm sure you won't want to live at home with me and my mother, so you and me have to get ourselves an apartment. I can move out of home and into the place we pick so it'll be warmed up, so to speak, before we get married. I've got an eye on a place of Tony Abel's just off Commerce Street. I'm sure Tony will give it to us real cheap. He's in the hands of factors as it is, and he won't want to risk losing a few months' rent. It's three-and-a-half rooms, and I'm sure we'll need the extra room eventually, ha-ha!"

"I know you've made your plans. Charles, but I have to tell you—"

"Wait a few minutes, Kay, till I'm finished and

you'll see how perfect it is." He chuckled as he ticked off the next point. "We'll furnish it pretty good because I don't believe in buying cheap stuff at all; it gets worn out faster and it isn't very economical. (I don't believe in frozen foods either, Kay; they're fast to make, all right, what you save in time you lose on account of a bad stomach. It just doesn't balance out.) Now if we get married in two months, that would be at the end of June, there'll be enough time for your parents to come out here and get acquainted, and for the invitations to be issued and accepted and so forth. Besides, all girls want to be June brides for some sentimental reason; you'd be surprised how many extra loans the bank makes in May. The point is that we can go through with it in style, then. The best is none too good for young Mrs. Bundy, and I really believe in getting the best at all times."

"Charles, I'm enormously complimented, but you have to let me tell you that—that I can't poss- —"

She had hesitated for a second too long, and it was all the encouragement that Charles needed. By the time she'd nerved herself to tell him what had to be said, Charles was reading through his list again.

"I have a two weeks' vacation coming to me, you know," he said. "I can get it at the end of June so we can combine honeymoon and vacation. The authorities say that bride and groom shouldn't do too much travelling, so what I say is that we rent a car into New York City and Kennedy Airport, then head out to Puerto Rico for a couple of weeks. The climate isn't too bad, you know, and by the time we get back it'll practically be midsummer and we'll have missed the really bad part of the heat. New York State in July isn't nearly as much fun as Puerto Rico, you know, what with gambling and all that."

Kay had given up trying to interrupt him. Almost near despair, she glanced out the window at the April night and told herself that she was too soft. Another

girl would have made it clear instantly that the relationship between them simply wasn't going to be of the type that continues in marriage. She was a redhead and for that reason supposed to be bad-tempered; there was Scottish blood in her family and for that reason she was supposed to be firm and pointlessly stubborn. But the truth was that Kay couldn't bear to hurt a fellow human being.

She could see another unfortunate side of her tenderheartedness as she looked idly around the three-quarters furnished two-and-a-half room apartment. She had been buying furniture one piece at a time because she didn't want any of the dealers in the town of Garden to think that one of the public school teachers wasn't buying all her furniture slowly but surely from each of them.

"In the summer we can get settled down," Charles said, looking at her and carefully smiling. "After all, I figure it's bound to take some time before the house is in good order. My mother will be glad to show you all the ropes about cooking and housekeeping. She always tells me she wants nothing more than to see me with a family of my own. And believe me, Kay, we're going to work at it. Being settled makes a lot more sense to a man than just hanging around, if you know what I mean."

"Yes, Charles, I'm sure you ought to find a nice girl who'll make you a good wi- —"

"I've found one," he grinned. "As I was going to say, I can get home for lunches, too, most days, so we could have three meals a day together. Eating out is not only expensive, but the food you get isn't nearly as good as home-made meals. We can be together for three whole meals a day."

Kay's head was rigidly erect. She took a step further from the window and toward the basket with wisteria which had shot up in the last few days.

"Then I assume you wouldn't want your wife to

work." Kay's voice took on a specially soft quality that even Charles recognized as being dangerous.

But he looked up and said firmly, "Of course not."

"In that case, I'm afraid I couldn't possibly marry you." The words were out at last, and Kay wished she could have told him how grateful she was for having been given this valid excuse as a reward for patience. "I couldn't possibly marry a man who'd want me to stop working before I had a family, Charles."

"But look here, I'm sure we can talk this over."

"I think we've exhausted the subject."

"We're not even close to that point." The cautious smile made his face seem a little lopsided. "I'm perfectly willing for you to finish out the school season. That's only fair and reasonable in the circumstances."

"Charles, I heard what you said before. Please don't break it down into sections for me. We're poles apart and that's all there is to that."

"You have to realize, Kay, that it just doesn't look well for the wife of an official at Garden National Bank to go to work. And let's not forget, in all seriousness, that my career is bound to be more important than yours because it'll last longer."

"Charles," she said with a tautness that any of her pupils would have recognized as underlining nearly the last word on a subject, "there isn't anything more to talk about."

"Now look here, Kay, we've got to have some sort of understanding. If you're only willing to figure out why I've got to lay down the law on this matter of your keeping a job after we're married, then I'm sure we could make our plans with much more confidence in each other."

"I've already made my plans, Charles," she said softly. "I'm not going to marry you, and I very much doubt whether you'd want to marry me if you knew me better. Really, I don't think we'd be good for each other."

"I'd marry you any day of the week, Kay, and you know it."

"Then let's put it like this: I'm not going to stand in the way between you and your career."

"You won't listen to reason," Charles said through stiff lips. "You're not willing to compromise."

"Not on the subject of my career, no," Kay told him. And then, smiling, she said, "If you promise not to talk about it any more, Charles, I'll pour you some Irish coffee."

"No, thanks, I have to drive home." Charles stood up, his back as rigid as one of Kay's rulers at school. He folded the list carefully and made a point of raising it in the air before he fitted it into an inside pocket of his conservatively-cut dark suit. "Tomorrow is labor day, you know, ha-ha! Monday."

He turned swiftly and hurried out of the room to the foyer. As he opened the front door, Kay heard him call out to her:

"Somebody has to convince you what your best interests are, and I wouldn't be surprised if that happens before very long."

He closed the door softly back of him. Kay heard his feet take the wooden steps one at a time, just as usual.

She locked the front door on herself and put the chain up across part of the door and the sturdy frame. She decided against sending Charles a friendly letter wishing him all the luck in the world in his future. The letter would have been a sincere one, of course, but in this kind of situation it was more decent to make a complete split.

Not till she was unzipping her short forest green evening dress did Kay remember that Charles' being alienated from her was going to pose a minor but irritating problem to her own career. In the first flash of recollection an abrupt movement of hers caused the zipper to become stuck in its place, and she needed ten minutes of hard work to undo it. By that time Kay was

too tired and annoyed to think about her little problem any further till morning.

And she couldn't know that in the conversation with Charles she had indirectly paved the way for her being brought in the very near future to the forbidding old mansion that was called Storm House.

Two

AT EIGHT-TWENTY in the morning, ten minutes before her usual time for leaving the apartment, Kay stepped out to the narrow bright street.

She started the three block walk over to Commerce Street and the bus stop, knowing that she faced a monotonous ride out to the Garden Public School. Before she had told Charles that she wouldn't marry him, it had been his habit to call for her every workday morning and drive her out to the school. He enjoyed a morning drive "to let the car have a workout", as he used to explain when they got under way. Come to think of it, Kay had noticed long ago that car owners enjoyed nothing better than giving a lift to people they knew who didn't happen to own a car. Kay would have bought one for herself, but she could imagine getting into one court fight after another as a result, and preferred to depend on other transportation.

Well, she was going to pay the price for it now.

She was wondering whether she'd be able to persuade Miss Agnes Quigley, the co-worker who drove her home after a day's work, to pick her up in the morning. Agnes wasn't the friendliest girl in town by a long chalk, and Kay had sometimes wondered why she herself was able to get along with her. Kay didn't realize that if she put her mind to it she could have become a close friend of the devil himself.

She had reached the other side of the street when she saw Charles Bundy's sensible little fiery red Volkswagen turn into the block. Charles waved to her, called her name and then pulled over directly to Kay's side. He was dressed in sober black, as usual for him on weekdays, and he looked at least five years older as a result.

"Get in," he said, drawing his long body easily across the length of the front seat in order to open the door near Kay.

There was a pause, and Kay decided against repaying kindness by turning down the offer.

"I appreciate this, Charles, but in the circumstances I'll admit I'm a little surprised."

"It's my pleasure," he said, shifting to one side almost as if he was going to take a bow where he sat. "I believe in treating a girl politely at all times."

Kay felt her brows soar, and hoped he hadn't guessed at her feeling of shock. Charles would generally point out when she thanked him for picking her up that he took her to work every morning for a number of highly practical reasons, and then list them one by one. Elaborate courtesy from Charles was genuinely unsettling.

"You've forgotten to put on the safety belt," he said, and obviously caught himself just short of explaining how she should do it. Instead he gestured to a cake box on the ledge and opened it before starting to drive. "Have some. They're cookies, you know."

"Yes, I know what they are." Kay took one to keep from offending him. "They look very fresh."

"My mother's having a card party this afternoon and she asked me to buy her some cookies and give them to her at lunch. I figured she wouldn't need more than fifty cookies, but it seems that bakeries only sell them by weight and not number. I had to go to three different places before a counter man agreed to do

what I wanted. They weigh a pound and three-quarters, incidentally."

"Delicious, too," Kay said as sincerely as she could manage. The cookies were probably a few days old, judging from the one she'd swallowed.

"I'm glad you like them," he told her. "I picked them up this early because I thought you'd want to have a little something extra to nibble at before the day's work."

"Thank you," she said politely.

"Girls appreciate little courtesies, from what I'm being told."

"Everybody does. Not only girls."

"I suppose so, but a girl cares more about the little courtesies than the big considerations."

"Do you really think so?" She paused thoughtfully. "Is that why you're laying yourself out to be so nice to me? Do you think I'll change my mind about marrying you if I start to become convinced that you're another Sir Galahad?"

He flushed. "That's a pretty cruel way of putting it."

"Charles, believe me when I tell you that I wouldn't want to hurt your feelings. It's just that no matter what else happens between us I've decided that I don't want to marry you. I hope we can be friends, but anything more is simply out of the question."

He couldn't help saying, "I wonder if you'll still think so when you realize how much you need me."

"Oh, Charles, you're making this so hard for both of us."

"Me?" He was stung. "I never complicate anything."

"I guess you're right about that, Charles, in a way, but let's not go into it now."

She turned to look out the window at the two- and three-story buildings along the familiar route. The car was eased cautiously into Commerce Street with its

rows of neat and old-fashioned store windows gleaming in the daylight. They drifted away from Commerce and out towards the private homes with their small grounds and then the huge controlled sprawl of a building that was the Garden Public School.

Charles drove, as usual, toward the parking slots reserved for teachers. As usual, too, he stopped the car just before reaching them. A woman was stepping out of a three year old Chevrolet, and Kay recognized Miss Agnes Quigley. Charles was clearing his throat, probably to make some ridiculously flowery speech as part of his campaign to win her by empty courtesies. To save herself the embarrassment of having to listen, Kay called out:

"Oh, Ag- —"

She didn't get any further because Charles Bundy had apparently decided to make a complete fool of himself. He leaned forward with lips already puckered in order to give her a farewell kiss for the first time since she'd been riding to work with him; but when he saw Kay turn toward the door he suddenly reached out a soft but firm hand around her waist and drew her close to himself.

"Just so you'll remember me," he said in a deeper voice than usual, "till tomorrow."

He planted a moist kiss on her forehead. Kay put both palms against his chest and extended them when she was able to pull away. His lips smelled powerfully of sensen and coffee.

"I suppose that's your idea of being a gentleman," she said, reaching for the doorknob and stepping out of the car. "Well, you're wrong, Charles, but thanks for the lift."

She was going to add that she thought it would be better for both of them if they didn't keep on riding together for awhile. Somebody's eyes knifed her at the side and she turned to her right instead.

Miss Agnes Quigley, heavy hands on hips, was

scowling bitterly. Even the scotch-plaid coat she was wearing seemed to shake with indignation. Miss Quigley was in her forties, with suspiciously black hair, a foreshortened nose, and a figure that couldn't be considered anything but dumpy. She had never been married, and every so often complained to her friends about the high percentage of men who weren't, as she genteelly called it, "quite right in the head about women". She would give an occasional party (always a decorous one) at her own superbly furnished apartment, and it was well known at the Garden Public School that she ruled other people's children with an iron hand.

Kay was smiling affably when she approached the white-painted line between two slots, where Miss Quigley was standing.

"Disgusting!" Agnes Quigley sniffed. "You could at least have the decency to confine this sort of thing to your private life."

"Agnes, I didn't have the slightest idea Mr. Bundy was going to turn into a great lover all of a sudden."

"And of course you didn't call out so as to get my attention and make sure that an old maid was looking when the fellow kissed you. Of course you did it on purpose, Kay Campbell, and that really *is* unforgiveable."

"Are you finished lecturing?" Kay asked mildly. "I called out because I figured we ought to go over a few details in advance of the afternoon's trip."

But Agnes Quigley, eyes on a point straight ahead of her and nothing else, had started walking with determination over to the staff entrance. Every firm step that she took was like a reproach to Kay.

There was nothing else for Kay to do but follow at a distance, silently. The little incident with Charles couldn't have taken place at a worse time, considering that Kay's class was going to join Agnes Quigley's in a museum trip this afternoon. It looked like an even more difficult time lay ahead than Kay had anticipated.

When classes left the grounds during school hours it was known to the principal as a field trip, to the children as exploring, and to the teachers among themselves as letting out the animals. Kay always planned as many trips as possible in conjunction with Agnes Quigley, who was far and away the best disciplinarian at Garden Public School, and just as effective on the outside.

Because Agnes Quigley wasn't talking to Kay, a longer wait than necessary was involved for Kay and her students in order to get on board the special bus. When all the children were inside that rickety vehicle, Agnes Quigley took it on herself to bark out an order to one of Kay's boys who had just punched a girl in the back. Kay, who had seen the infraction and was going to make her rebuke a milder one, didn't say anything to Miss Quigley in the children's presence; but the older woman noticed with grudging respect that Kay's eyes flashed sparks.

Kay's antagonism didn't keep Agnes Quigley from ordering all the boys in together and then all the girls to follow. Kay, bringing up the rear, swallowed the words that rushed to her lips. She would argue the matter with Agnes Quigley later on, and it was going to be a long cold day under the ground when Agnes Quigley gave Kay's children some orders after this day's field trip.

The Garden Museum of Art had been willed to the town by a multi-millionaire who had lived far away even from Garden's outskirts and had democratically allowed his chauffeur to observe the speed laws while driving through Commerce Street. The museum staff was competent, the place was clean, and the current exhibition was a travelling show without a single trace of modern art in it. Miss Quigley had repeatedly asked the staff for reassurances on that point, and had made a brief inspection of the exhibit to satisfy herself.

"We will go from room to room," Agnes Quigley di-

rected. "And I want all of you to stay together. Michael, *stop that fighting at once;* do you hear me?"

The walls of the first room were chock-a-block with paintings of nature scenes along with an occasional portrait. The sculpting was mostly of ancient warriors in what must have been colorful headdress. The boy called Michael was caught trying to bite a stone feather from one of the statues, and Miss Quigley savaged him while the other children fidgeted.

Agnes Quigley paused briefly in front of the door of the next room. "Now here's a room that I myself haven't seen yet, children. We'll all find out together just exactly what's inside. Prudence, please open the door. Michael, will you *please* keep the line straight? Now children, we can all—"

There was a split-second of icy silence. Agnes Quigley stood with her mouth open. She was about to reach for the door and shut it firmly, but Kay called out:

"Move inside, children. Hurry now."

Agnes Quigley said determinedly, "Not this room, Miss Campbell. The children don't have to see what's inside here."

But Kay was already directing the children with words and gestures. Agnes Quigley didn't want to make a scene. As always on a field trip, the teachers were on their best behavior but the children were on the brink of disorder.

The room was in darkness except for bluish spotlights beating down from above on two full-size statues. The one that had no doubt caused Agnes Quigley to recoil showed a man carrying a sword and he was entirely nude except for a fig leaf. It was a magnificent piece of work. Some ancient sculptor had truly fashioned a man out of stone.

Kay, her eyes riveted in fascination on the extraordinary work she hadn't wanted her pupils to miss, realized that Agnes Quigley was coldly and angrily di-

recting everybody's attention to the other statue. This one showed a man with headdress that looked like part of a modern man's shaving brush, armor at the shoulders, hips and private parts. In one hand he held something that reminded Kay of a boomerang. The statue didn't have nearly as much power as the near-nude.

"This man was a soldier many, many years ago," Agnes Quigley was saying. "At least, this is what a soldier in those days looked like. I don't suppose there are any questions, so we'll all go into the next—what's wrong? Miss Campbell, *what's wrong?*"

Kay was rushing over to the other statue. In glancing at it while Agnes Quigley was talking about the warrior, she had seen the boy named Michael climbing past the pedestal and upwards. There was a pencil between his teeth, and Kay assumed that he was intending to make a mark on the sculpture. She didn't care so much whether or not he defaced the work as long as he himself wasn't hurt.

Agnes Quigley shouted:

"Michael, I want you down here at once!"

The boy paused, his bushy blond hair swaying when he cocked his head. When he glanced down, he suddenly hugged the statue more tightly. Fear had come into his eyes.

Kay, both hands extended, said softly to him, "Climb down a little further, Michael, and I'll be able to reach you. Just a little bit, and everything will be fine."

Agnes Quigley loudly directed the children to face the wall and came running over to the base of what she considered the offensive statue.

"This is all your fault," she whispered to Kay. "You and this outrageous naked man of yours!"

To the boy she called out:

"Instantly, I said, Michael! Instantly!"

The boy's fear was probably increased on account of the threatening voice so close to him. Michael hugged

the statue more tightly. The pencil with which he'd been going to do some damage dropped from his mouth and rolled along the floor.

In a white heat, Agnes Quigley jumped into the air and pushed the boy's left leg.

"Down, I said!"

Instead of galvanizing the frightened child, her action caused him to lose his grip on the statue and fall.

Kay had been standing on tiptoes and ready to ease him down, but she wasn't ready for the young body narrowly missing her before she could move to protect him. Michael struck the floor. There was a pause brought on by shock and then the boy's cries seemed to fill the room.

Agnes Quigley whispered to Kay, "I consider you entirely responsible for this."

Kay held her anger in check. Softly she said:

"You'd better call for a doctor."

"I have a good mind to let the boy lay there and *rot* forever. He's done nothing to deserve any help."

"I'll ask one of my children to make the phone call."

"Nonsense," Agnes Quigley snapped. "You probably can't wait to see if the doctor who'll come here is good looking and single."

She turned away briskly and walked out of the room. Kay's eyes followed her through the open door and to a phone booth at the far end of the corridor. She lowered herself to where the boy lay and spoke soothingly to him. The boy's cries were softened to whimpers and at one point he reached out a hand to hold her. . . .

Kay was called into the principal's office during lunch hour on the next day, Tuesday. Mr. Wick, the principal, was, like Kay, partly of Scottish ancestry. He was stubborn, hard-working, and with the Scots' surprising fondness for jokes about thrifty Scots. He was a tall dark-haired man who wore rimless glasses that he would take off and wipe every few minutes during

the work day. Pictures of his wife and four children faced him on the desk in the wide and airy office.

"I suppose you know that the boy, Michael Howard, will be out of the hospital in a few days and as good as new," he began gently. "It could have been a much more serious accident, heaven knows, but young bones seem to heal miraculously."

"I'm very glad for Michael's sake."

Mr. Wick accepted that with a nod. "I'd like to ask you a couple of questions about what caused the accident, Miss Campbell. That is, if you've got no objections."

"Why should I object? Maybe we can all work out a way to prevent any such thing from happening again on one of the field trips."

"That's my point exactly." Mr. Wick managed to look relieved and wary at the same time. "Now then, Miss Campbell, you claim that the boy started to climb the statue and you then came over to get him down. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"You also claim that you didn't touch him at any time till he was on the ground. Is that correct, too?"

"I'm not 'claiming' that anything happened, Mr. Wick; I'm telling what happened. Miss Quigley will be glad to confirm what I've said, I'm sure."

Mr. Wick's eyes back of the glasses blinked rapidly. Behind him, on the other side of the huge double window, a boy stood on rigorously clipped grass and threw a basketball at somebody out of sight.

"I've already spoken to Miss Quigley," the principal said with surprising primness. "What I'd like you to tell me now, if you will, is why you didn't raise yourself to help bring the boy down."

"I stood on tiptoes but didn't touch him. I was afraid he might fall and hurt himself."

"Which, as we know, is exactly what did happen."

Mr. Wick caught himself doodling absently on his blotter and put the ball point pen into the slot on the desk. "Perhaps you'll tell me how you claim the accident happened."

"I'll tell you how it *did* happen." Kay's bright red hair seemed to dance against her scalp on account of subdued anger.

"All right, Miss Campbell. I should know better than to tangle with outraged Scottish honor. Please go on."

"Miss Quigley saw what had happened and came over to the base of the statue to assist me. Together, we tried to bring the boy down. He had become terrified of the height and of the punishment that he expected, so he couldn't make himself move."

"The boy says that Miss Quigley tried to reach him. Is that correct?"

"I suppose—yes, it's correct."

"Michael says, too, that he lost his balance and fell down and that you helped him when he was hurt," Mr. Wick said. "The problem before us, as I don't have to tell you, is to decide how he was hurt."

"I've just told you that."

"Miss Campbell, is there anything you can add to the statement?"

"No, sir."

"There's nothing you've left out, then? You've been entirely truthful?"

"I have, yes."

"You don't, for instance, feel that you'd rather not put Miss Quigley's job in peril by claiming that she was responsible for the boy's being hurt?"

Kay felt herself flushing, but she said firmly, "Mr. Wick, I don't have anything to add or take away from what I've told you."

"Yes, yes, you're obviously a good-hearted girl. I only wish—"

Kay's brows soared. The principal didn't generally

make such polite evaluations of character in public and to a teacher's face.

"What's wrong, Mr. Wick?"

"Well, I hate to be the one who tells you, but I suppose someone has to." Mr. Wick studied a point over Kay's head. "Agnes Quigley has told me that you were the one responsible for the accident. She has accused you, I'm afraid, of negligence."

"Me? But *I* didn't—oh, you're mistaken. Agnes wouldn't go that far."

"You oughtn't to judge the behavior of others by what *you* would do in a given situation," Mr. Wick counselled. "Miss Quigley was most vehement about assigning the blame to you alone."

"Have you spoken to any children who were in the room when it happened?"

"I have, yes, and in such an indirect way that I doubt if they knew what was really on my mind. The children had been ordered by Miss Quigley to face the wall, you know, and none of them would flaunt their disobedience of any order given by Agnes Quigley. They can't claim to have seen what may have really happened."

"Then it's Miss Quigley's word against mine."

"I'm very much afraid so. Would you like to tell me anything more?"

"Not till I've spoken to Agnes Quigley about it."

"I'm pretty sure there'll be no time for that." He glanced at his watch. "Definitely there won't be any time."

"I don't think I understand."

"When Agnes Quigley put the blame for what happened squarely on you, I did my duty and notified the school board." Mr. Wick threw his shoulders back. "A hearing on your case is scheduled in an hour at the school board's headquarters."

Kay closed her eyes tightly, and opened them to see dots of light pulsing around Mr. Wick's glasses.

"If I see Agnes before the hearing I'll try and get a chance to talk with her."

"As that's your final decision, I'll not stand in the way." His speech was becoming more clipped as he shuffled papers on his desk. "Good luck with all those squareheads on the board. Good luck, lass."

Three

THE SCHOOL board for the town of Garden met at the top floor of the town's largest office building, a sturdy old horror that ought to have been torn down years ago. The anteroom was large and dimly lit, with citations on the wall and a portrait of the first chairman of the school board. The first chairman happened to be a great-great-grandfather of the present incumbent.

Kay had been waiting near the receptionist's desk for twenty minutes when the board room door opened and closed on Agnes Quigley. She gave one look at Kay, then began to walk hurriedly toward the outer door.

Kay had stood up and was directly in her path.

"Is it true that you've accused me of negligence?" Kay demanded.

"I don't have to talk to you."

"Agnes, have you got the nerve to claim that I'm responsible for pushing that boy off the statue?"

"I told the truth." Miss Quigley sniffed. "You'll have much more time to run after your men friends if you don't go to a job, and you can spend your extra time in the museum looking at statues of naked men."

Kay had taken a step toward the older woman when she became aware of a gentle hand restraining her. A blue-uniformed man was touching her arm in such a

way that she knew he'd get a tight grip should she lose her remaining self-control.

Agnes Quigley walked around Kay and over to the door. With the knob in a hand, she turned back triumphantly and said:

"*There's* another man for you to make love with in a car, sometime."

The school board door opened and closed on a black-clad secretary who had started inside as soon as she had noticed that Agnes Quigley and Kay were headed for a collision. She shot her cuffs demurely on approaching Kay and the uniformed man. Her smile was like something that had been pasted on.

"Miss Campbell, the board members would like you to wait for a while longer. They figure that by then your temper will have calmed down and you'll be able to talk reasonably. They know you must be upset after what just happened, and they're not in the mood for another—um, emotional outburst."

"I see." Kay made a point of taking a deep breath. "How long am I to wait out here?"

"An hour at the most, I'm sure. The board members haven't eaten yet, for one thing, and they want to discuss the case over a quiet meal rather than be subjected to—"

"If the board members can eat, so can I," Kay said. "I'll be back here in less than an hour."

It was a surprisingly raw afternoon, with patches of fog that reminded her of her most recent visit to New York City. Kay walked into Kringley's Department Store, one of those huge barnlike places which had been purposely laid out to be uncomfortable and thereby convince women customers that its items were priced more cheaply. Not if she lived to be a hundred years old would she be able to understand what it was that gave retailers such a low opinion of their customers' collective brain power.

In common with most members of her sex, Kay had long ago decided that the only way to relieve feelings of great stress was to go shopping. She allotted twenty minutes of her time for buying some bauble or other and finally treated herself to a pair of earrings that looked almost as if a crystal chandelier in miniature had been suspended from each one of them.

Kringley's quick-lunch counter was located on the second floor against the farthest wall from the entrance and past a number of eye-catching displays. The menu listed dainty little sandwiches and drinks that were free from any taint of calorie. Kay decided to be good to herself and let her figure go to hell for just this once.

A dapper gentleman sat down on the raised swivel chair next to Kay as she finished the first glass of her chocolate malted and took the first bite out of her tuna-on-toast sandwich. He was probably in his forties, a thin and dark-haired fellow with a softly quizzical smile. There was something familiar about his appearance and he glanced at Kay as if he felt like that as far as she was concerned.

"Aren't you—?" he began, then nodded. "Oh, yes, you left the school board room a little while back."

"How do you know?"

"Well, my office is on the floor underneath, so you couldn't have come from anywhere else when you got on the elevator to go down. Besides, I'm not likely to forget how worried you looked. As a matter of fact, you still do."

"I have a very good reason for it," Kay said grimly.

"Before you came down, there was an older woman on the elevator," he said. "It stopped at my floor because I'd pushed the button; then walked away for a minute. I asked her to hold the door open for me, but she wouldn't do it. She looked as if she hated me, and I don't think she'd ever seen me before in her life."

The man sounded as if he was ready to sympathize

with Kay, no matter how disturbing her story might be. Besides, he looked as if he'd be disappointed and even hurt if she didn't tell him about it. Without mentioning names, Kay told him what had happened. The man was asking her some question or other when she realized that it was almost an hour since she had left. Kay excused herself and hurried over to the stairs.

If she had glanced back at the quizzically smiling man she would have seen him hurriedly making notes in a small book and then get up to rush toward the bank of phone booths.

Kay had to wait for twenty minutes when she got back to the dimly lighted anteroom. She was finally admitted to a long room with a conference table and a chair against the picture window. The receptionist gestured her to that chair. The board chairman, looking startlingly like the portrait of his great-great-grandfather, peered at her from over the rims of dark glasses and sighed.

"Now Miss Campbell, we were told some facts not too long ago by Agnes, that is, by Agnes Quigley. I wonder if you'd care to comment about exactly what happened at the Garden Museum of Art yesterday afternoon."

"Yes," Kay said, settling down into the chair for what was probably going to be a long session. "In the circumstances, I'm afraid I'll have to tell you exactly what did happen at the museum."

"I could certainly be kicked out of my job," she said to Charles Bundy, "and not be able to get another one till you-know-where freezes over."

There were at the Splendid Restaurant, one of the two places in Garden which featured kosher cooking. When Kay was upset she found the thick soups and unspiced meat dishes obscurely comforting. It was a large place (half of it had once been a movie theatre) with claw-footed tables topped by snowy napkins. The

chairs reminded Kay of baked lima beans that had sagged in the middle.

Charles had phoned her at home and asked to have dinner with her. He had suggested eating out for the reason that they'd be given more time to talk. Kay, tired and not willing to let him think he was being treated unfairly, had agreed under the condition that the two of them eat at the Splendid.

He had listened open-mouthed to Kay's story of what'd happened to her during the day. His temples, gray in spite of youthfulness, shone dully in the light from overhead. He was dressed in black and red, with a soft shirt and a tie that had been mechanically knotted on a plastic frame and was hooked into place over the shirtfront.

Carefully he asked, "Do you think that the board people believed you?"

"I don't see why not." Kay cleared her throat, which was mildly inflamed from having talked so much to the board members late in the afternoon. "I told them the truth."

"Well, they might still take the easy way out and choose to believe what Agnes Quigley says, instead."

"Why should they?"

"Most of the board members know Agnes because she lived in town all her life and was born here. Why a bank director is on the board and Agnes has had an account with us at the Garden National since she was old enough to start a Christmas Club fund. By comparison, Kay, you're a foreigner. You've been living and working in Garden for only two-and-a-half years. You have roots in North Dakota. Believe me, those facts alone could make the difference to a lot of board members."

Kay nodded slowly, watching him push his plate of clear soup ("I want to *see* what I'm drinking," he'd told her after he'd ordered it) to one side. He had

asked for coffee with his meal and a cup with its contents dark as pitch, steamed at his right.

"I'm almost certain I convinced some of the board members at least," she said, gratified now that she came to think of it. "I saw more than one of them nod her head while I was talking."

"You should have pitched your story only at the chairman," Charles said. "Old man Passy has got 'em all under his thumb."

"I suppose there's some truth in that, but I hated to just assume that there's only one person I'm talking to." She couldn't help feeling annoyed. "Things aren't as simple as you make them out to be, Charles."

"Well, maybe not, and you've lived a quiet life clear of scandal, so you've got some chance to win your point with old Passy and therefore with the rest of 'em. More than anybody else I know, Passy is a stickler for the conventions."

"Those people must recognize the truth when they hear it," Kay said calmly. "They know darn well that they heard the truth from me today."

"Let's hope they do, of course," Charles said. A smile played across his thick lips. "If they vote against you, though, would that make you change your mind about me?"

"What?"

"Would you hook up with me, Kay? We know and like each other. If I marry you I don't have to go out and find somebody else who I may not like as much, and you'll have a comfortable perch to fall back on in case the board does turn thumbs down on you."

"Believe me, Charles, I appreciate your still being fond of me," she said carefully, "but it wouldn't work out between us under any circumstances."

"Well, you hold it in mind, Kay. If the board decides to keep both you and Agnes, fine for you. If they decide in favor of her, then you'll probably need a

different career. I'm offering one, and I'm willing to make my offer again if results go against you with the board."

"I doubt very much whether the board will send me away," she said thoughtfully. "After the presentation I made this afternoon it would need an earthquake to turn those people against me." . . .

She had automatically set the alarm to wake her at the usual time next morning, and when she got up she realized that she couldn't go to work today. Late in the afternoon she'd phone the school board receptionist to find out if she still had a job and a career. There was plenty of time stretching ahead of her.

Kay decided to do her Saturday chores in advance, cleaning the apartment and shopping for the next few days' food. The household work didn't give her as much pleasure as usual. She was able to think while she was doing it, and too many painful thoughts crowded into her head.

Her phone rang at eleven o'clock. The noise was shocking. She flipped the vacuum cleaner off, lowered the volume of the music on her F.M. set, and reached for the telephone next to the bed. Her palms were wet, but not from overwork.

A friend's familiar voice was on the other end, office noises coming through the receiver as well.

"Fran," Kay said. "How did you know I'd be home today?"

"Oh, dear, I called up to commiserate and you haven't even heard about it." Fran Carslake's voice took on a high distressed whine. "I'm awfully sorry, Kay."

"Sorry about what, for heaven's sake?"

"Well, I hate to be the one who tells you, and there isn't too much free time today in the office. It's a madhouse here, in fact. But if I have to tell you, honey, here goes: according to—oh, oh. The boss is coming over to see if I've typed some papers and they ought to have been finished an hour ago. I have to hang up, but

anyhow it's all in the *Eagle,* and you can read it there. So long, and I'm really very sorry."

When Kay brought back a copy of the *Garden Eagle* not long afterwards as part of her midweek shopping tour, she was terribly sorry, too. She couldn't have expected what had happened; and yet, because she hadn't wanted to disappoint a stranger she had contrived at her own ruination, professionally.

She could remember the man as vividly as if he were sitting next to her at this minute, the friendly and fortyish man at the lunch counter asking polite questions. The man who had no doubt followed her after she had left the school board office, and had waited patiently for a chance to talk with her. The man who had listened to her story with its absence of names and dates, then had no doubt done a little quiet checking on his own, and handed all the facts in to the *Garden Eagle.*

An old picture of her, taken a few years ago, stared at Kay from the front page. The story that accompanied it told in detail about the hearing and why it had taken place.

As if through a leaden fog she could hear Charles Bundy saying, " . . . you've lived a quiet life clear of scandal, so you've got some chance to win your point with old Passy . . . Passy is a stickler for the conventions."

And now her story was splashed across the *Eagle's* pages, along with a picture that would identify her in case the story alone didn't happen to give enough information for the residents of Garden.

Numbly she arranged her day's purchases for convenience in the kitchen. She prepared a skimpy lunch for herself and ate mechanically, but she remembered to lower the radio still further because there was a baby asleep in the apartment below.

It hardly surprised Kay shortly afterwards to hear a ring at the doorbell and see a messenger with a letter for which she was to sign. Kay not only signed her

name precisely but retained enough presence of mind to give the boy a twenty-five cent tip. The letter, as she sensed before it was half-open, told her in the most brusque terms that her services would no longer be required by the school system of the town of Garden. Almost as an afterthought it added that her back pay would be sent to any address she might designate.

So a blaze of publicity, of scandal accompanied by an old photograph of herself, had ended Kay Campbell's career in the town of Garden; and was likely to make matters easier for that well-known native, Agnes Quigley. Not to put too fine a point on it, Kay had lost the career she'd wanted most of all. She didn't have any illusions about the problem of getting another teaching job in a school system.

A telegram arrived at half-past four. It had been handed in at Kinnina, which was two towns away in the direction of the state capital. Kay read it with a mounting sense of wonder.

PLEASE BE HOME AT EIGHT-THIRTY TONIGHT STOP AN INTERESTING JOB POSSIBILITY WILL BE BEFORE YOU.
R. STORM

Storm, she thought, is a strange name for a good samaritan.

With a furious intensity that drove every other problem out of her mind, Kay resumed cleaning the apartment.

Four

Miss Storm was apparently a fanatic for punctuality. Kay's doorbell rang at twenty-five minutes past eight. When she opened it, though, it was Charles Bundy who stood on the other side of the threshold.

"There was something I wanted to tell you," Charles said stiffly, "so I came by."

"I'm expecting a visitor," Kay pointed out, "on a business matter."

"This won't take me long."

Kay stood aside. Charles walked in and commented that the wisteria tree in the living room had grown out of all knowledge since his last visit. That she had slaved to clean up the apartment was a fact which Charles, typically, didn't seem to notice.

"Kay, I suppose you remember what I said to you last night about a decision going against you. With that news story in today's *Eagle* I'm sure that the school board did decide against you."

"That's right, they did."

"And you remember I said that if it happened this way I'd talk to you again about marriage."

He smiled weakly, giving his receding chin some transitory prominence.

"Charles, I'd like nothing better than to go into it with you right now," she said, picking her words meticulously, "but I really don't have the time. In fact, this visit of yours might be a little awkward if the woman I'm going to see should find you here."

"What I wanted to tell you," Charles began.

The doorbell rang.

Kay walked into the small foyer and opened the door. A darkly handsome man stood facing her. He was perhaps just this side of thirty.

"Miss Campbell? I hope you received my telegram this afternoon. I'm Rolf Storm."

"Oh yes, of course." Kay wished she hadn't automatically assumed that a woman had sent the telegram. "Won't you come in?"

Rolf Storm nodded and gave her his colorful coat to hang up. He wore a red-gray-white sports jacket, a blue shirt with a hand-painted tie, herringbone slacks, dark blue stockings and coal black shoes. After so

many months of looking at Charles and his ultra-conservative clothes, such splashes of color were a feast to the eyes. Kay herself, in a silver-trimmed pink faille dress that was supposed to look attractively modest, felt like a dowdy old maid in the same room with Rolf Storm in his sports outfit.

As for Charles, both eyes darted wonderingly from the garish clothes to the patrician face and back again. He seemed to have been hypnotized by the notion of a man as well off as Rolf Storm apparently was who dressed himself with such carefree abandon.

The two men shook hands, Charles rigidly and Rolf Storm with a casual air. Charles said that he'd have to be on his way, but couldn't bring himself to make a move in the direction of the door.

Kay's fingers touched Storm's when she handed him the gin-and-tonic he had agreed to drink. The fingers were like curved steel. She was aware of bright, sharp eyes that rested appraisingly on her for a moment, then slid away.

"You have an attractive place here," he said in a pleasant baritone voice, "and you keep it as well as it deserves."

"Thank you," Kay said, flushing with pleasure.

Storm sat down and crossed his legs, putting new creases in the colorful clothing.

"I realized that you were going to be in a difficulty, Miss Campbell, as soon as I saw the news story about you," he told her. "Small town people, by and large, hate outsiders and sensations that become public in just about that order."

Charles opened his mouth to say something, but clamped it shut at Kay's studiously blank glance. With Storm on the sofa and Kay on the soft chair opposite, only Charles remained on his feet. Kay saw him take a step out of the room and then halt himself mulishly to listen further.

"I telegraphed from Kinnina," Storm was saying,

"because I know that in a small town the phone can be listened in on with almost no trouble. Small town women invented espionage before separate countries even came into existence."

With one eye on the garish clothes, Charles asked, "Are *you* on the Kinnina school board?"

Storm was brusque. "No, of course not."

"Then why do you want to hire—?"

Kay interrupted smoothly, "I'd like Mr. Storm to tell me what's on his mind, Charles, in his own way. I hope that it's all right with you if he does."

Charles said stiffly, "I have to be going, but I'll talk to you for a minute as soon as you're free. It'll save me a little time later on."

"I realize that you want to make things simple for yourself," she said lightly.

"Miss Campbell, I have no objections if Mr.—yes, Bundy, hears what I'm going to say." Rolf Storm leaned back so that his dark hair touched the top of the sofa. His eyes were closed. "It won't take me very long to speak my piece."

"Whatever you like, Mr. Storm."

"The problem is really a simple one," Rolf Storm said, more serious now. "I live in a place called Storm House a few minutes past Kinnina. My sister lives there too, and so does our nephew William—alias Wink. Wink is eight years old, and with even less than the small boy's usual tendency toward paganism."

He sounded as if he regretted such a deficiency in the boy. His next words confirmed it:

"Of course the world won't let Wink feel in any way like a free soul. He has to be regimented still further, Miss Campbell, and taught to toe the line perfectly."

"Do you want me to be his teacher?"

"Yes. I'm not sending Wink to public school for—um, various reasons, so the world decrees that the boy will need private instruction." He smiled sympathetically. "I suppose it's not the kind of teaching situ-

ation you'd prefer, Miss Campbell, but it's the only one I can offer you."

Kay swallowed disappointment at being asked to use all her skills on one spoiled and arrogant child when there were so many good and appreciative children she wasn't going to be allowed to teach. Not, at least, till the memory of what had happened at Garden became dim and the incident was reduced in size to only a blot on an otherwise long and good record.

"I take it, Miss Campbell, that you'll have some free time in the immediate future," he said. "Then there won't be any harm in your coming down to Storm House to look us over and, of course, my sister doing the same to you. Jessica is a hard employer in many ways, I'm afraid, as a number of previous governesses have found out. If you can satisfy her, you can satisfy anybody."

Kay winced, but kept her thought to herself. She was imagining a woman who was as harsh as her brother was permissive, another Agnes Quigley type.

"Tomorrow is Thursday," Storm said thoughtfully, finishing his gin-and-tonic. "If you leave here at eleven, you should be at the house by twelve-thirty—give or take half an hour. My sister will expect you in the early afternoon, then, Miss Campbell. Is that all right with you?"

"Yes, it is. I certainly think we should all get to know each other better before I take the job—always assuming that I get the offer."

"Good." He put the empty glass carefully back on the metallic coaster, then walked to the foyer. Kay helped him into his coat. Storm didn't make any other remarks, having already said what was on his mind. He nodded affably at her from the doorway, raised a hand to catch Charles Bundy's attention by way of a casual goodbye, and walked out. Kay heard his footsteps as he proceeded languidly down the stairs and out the front door of the building.

Charles was in the foyer when she turned. He was taking his own coat out of the closet, his usual practice at Kay's apartment when he had come in with the coat instead of leaving it in his Volkswagen.

"About *our* business, Kay," he said, turning around with the dark coat already over a shoulder. "I've been talking to you about marriage and I even said that I'd bring it up again if the school board verdict went against you, as I admit I was more than half hoping it would."

"Charles, believe me I'm too tired to rehash that whole thing with you again."

"This won't take long." He drew a deep breath. "I like to get a thing over with and say what has to be said as soon as possible. All right, then, here goes: the story in the newspaper has made me change my mind about wanting to marry you."

Kay decided to keep a poker face rather than give an agreeable smile, as she was tempted to do.

"Really, Charles?"

"For one thing, my getting married to somebody who'd gotten that sort of publicity would look bad to my bosses at the Garden National. I know they wouldn't have been upset at my marrying you, Kay, if only you'd been dismissed quietly. As it is, I might never get another promotion, you see, Kay. No, no, my mother is right when she says that it's dollars to doughnuts I'll be happier with a local girl."

"He nearly called out with surprise when Kay suddenly stood up on tiptoes and kissed him on the right cheek.

"Bless you, Charles, for listening to your mother. You really are a good boy."

"It was my own decision and I made up my own mind," he said vehemently. "What's more, if I thought that we could be happy together I—I'd take you over a shoulder to the City Hall and insist that the Mayor

perform a marriage ceremony in the middle of the night if necessary."

Kay nodded, although the idea of Charles Bundy defying the town's opinion was almost too much for her to hear without laughing.

He added, "I think we ought to have a clean break in the circumstances, Kay. It's a lot better like that, all around."

"Of course it is."

He looked stunned by the ease with which she had agreed. "I recognized some obligation after all this time," he said stiffly. "I mean, if you get into some sort of a jam and I can do anything, let me know and I'll be glad to help."

"Thank you, Charles," she said, eyes downcast. "I'm grateful for that."

"All right, then. Goodbye."

"Goodbye, Charles."

As his steps thundered down the stairs for the last time, Kay smiled softly. Charles was a likeable fellow, reasonably honest and the salt of the earth. One day he'd be a mildly lecherous member of the top echelon of officials at the Garden National Bank with his children at good schools in the East, a pillar of the golf club, a member of the school board and his church's board of governors, a leader in charity drives and a zealous campaigner for all candidates for public office advanced by the Republican party. His funeral would probably be every bit as exciting as his life.

If Kay ever did get into some sort of jam and he could help her, she'd think twice about asking him to do anything. A polite suggestion made in order to avert a tearful scene he didn't know would not have taken place was one thing; if she ever did ask for help in the future she'd be turned down so quickly that her head was likely to be swimming for months afterwards.

Not that she blamed him. As he'd said and actually

meant, the best way to cut off a relationship was to make a clean break.

Before Kay went to sleep that night, she phoned her parents in Fargo, North Dakota to tell them what had been happening to her, and promised to keep in touch. Her mother was distressed and full of advice that Kay couldn't use in the special circumstances in which she found herself. Her father simply said, "Do the best ye can, child, and ye'll nae have regrets."

Kay's last thought that night before she fell asleep was that at the very least she'd be seeing how some wealthy people lived. And she would spend a few hours, at any rate, in what was almost certainly a lovely home.

Five

A PHONE call early next morning helped her find out that the bus to Kinnina would be leaving at eleven-twenty. From the bus stop, a taxi would bring her to the Storm house for only a couple of dollars additional.

The weather was tricky in these early Spring days of April. By sticking her head out the window Kay decided that a light topcoat would do very nicely over a sensible navy blue dress with a medallion at her right shoulder, and sensible low-heel shoes. Above all, she had to look like a level-headed girl who wouldn't make trouble. If she had used glasses for reading, she'd have made a point of putting them on before the interview with Rolf Storm's sister.

Her doorbell rang at a quarter to eleven. No one was at the door and she decided that somebody was ringing from the hallway downstairs. She answered it, but no footsteps came up the stairs. She opened the door and

called, "Yes? What is it?" No one called back. She locked the door firmly behind her and hurried to the window that looked out on the street.

The man waving up at her was a stranger. He stood in front of a battered brown station wagon parked before the building. Muscles of his right hand, in an elbow-length work shirt, moved powerfully as she watched.

"Miss Campbell?" he called respectfully.

"Yes."

"I was sent over by Mr. Storm."

She was aware of her brows soaring in surprise.

The man explained, "He didn't want you maybe getting to the house so late as to make Miss Jessica sore."

"Come up here and wait for awhile."

He glanced at himself. Kay, following his eyes, could see the man's baggy pants and dust-caked shoes.

She said, "If your outfit doesn't bother me, it shouldn't bother you."

He was with her in a few minutes, a man just out of the late thirties. He turned out to be a six-footer whose badly sunburned face looked almost like the same texture as an orange. A shock of blond hair dangled at a point just above his right eye, and he swept it up awkwardly and uselessly with a calloused hand.

"Why don't you sit down?" she asked, smiling. "There'll be no charge for using the sofa."

"I'm much obliged," he said, but made a point of stepping into the kitchen and easing himself into one of the hard chairs that it wouldn't be difficult to rub dirt from later on. "You're very kind."

"Oh, nonsense! I can warm up some coffee for you."

"No, thanks, Miss." He folded his hands and sat attentively, like one of her pupils being scolded. "It's too much extra work for you on my account."

"All I have to do is turn on the gas jet under a half-full pot of coffee."

"It's awfully nice of you, Miss but—uh, I don't want to delay you much longer."

"Mr. Storm's sister must be quite a woman," Kay observed. "By the way, I don't know your name."

"Gibson, Miss."

"I'm not going to call you by your last name as if you were a servant in a Victorian novel."

"I'm Bert Gibson, Miss."

"And my first name is Kay," she said pleasantly. "I don't think that you're an outcast from society just because you work with your hands."

He was incapable of saying anything in response to that, but he looked down shyly.

"I'll be ready in a few minutes," she told him, walking into the bedroom and sitting down in front of the vanity mirror. "There's a radio on the cupboard, Bert, and you can put it on if you want to."

"No, thanks, Miss—I mean, Kay." He was still uncomfortable.

"I take it you're the handyman, Bert. Is that right?"

"Sort of. Mainly I do certain jobs for Mr. Storm."

"What kind of jobs?"

"Oh, little things he needs." Bert Gibson breathed heavily in what he must have realized was a questioning silence from Kay. "I've had a lot of printing experience, and he uses me to do his printing."

"Is that why he employs you?" It was a pointless question, of course, but she couldn't stand his having said "uses me." The man did indeed behave like a servant in a Victorian novel.

"Yes, mainly for the printing jobs," Bert Gibson answered awkwardly.

"I get the impression from listening to you that—well, that I may be too independent minded to enjoy working for the Storm's."

Bert Gibson coughed once to show that he realized

she expected him to say something, but for once he didn't oblige.

"The least you could do," Kay told him, examining her face in the vanity mirror just before she stood up, "is to tell me what makes you think so. As one worker to another."

She walked into the kitchen, ready to go except for having put on her coat. Bert Gibson, a fist poised over the kitchen table, withdrew it hurriedly as soon as he saw her. He flushed, and struck his left thigh with the fist.

"As a favor, Miss? I'll do you a favor, then, a real favor you'd appreciate if you knew what I do about those people. You look like a very nice—I mean, like somebody who deserves a very special favor."

"I'm grateful, Bert, but what is it?"

"I'll tell the Storms that you changed your mind about coming and that you've decided to turn the job down." He added shyly, "That is, if you want me to."

Kay asked, "What makes you think I'd want you to do that?"

"Well, you would if you knew as much about the Storms as I do."

"Since you know that much, Bert, and you obviously don't like what you know, what makes you keep on working for them?"

He shrugged. "The pay is pretty good, Miss, and a man is able to take care of himself in this kind of a situation."

"In *what* kind of a situation, for heaven's sake? I don't know what you're talking about. There doesn't seem to be a word of sense in any of it."

"Forget what I said, Miss. Forget I even mentioned as much as I did."

His mouth was closed tightly and he stared down at the checkered linoleum again. If he hadn't been as socially insecure as he was, she'd have argued with him.

He said quickly, "I'll go downstairs if you don't mind. I have to—uh, warm up the motor."

He looked longingly at Kay as if he needed her consent in order to go. Kay stepped aside. When Bert Gibson was at the door he turned back to her and said earnestly:

"Believe me, Miss, I know what's right for a well-brought-up girl like yourself, and I say that you shouldn't ever go out to Storm House."

He closed the door back of him.

Kay decided against leaving Bert Gibson alone in the car for too long a time. She hurried into a spring coat and checked to see that the gas jets were off and that the gate on the fire escape window was locked. When she reached the bracing street air, she heard the station wagon motor being raced at a furious tempo.

"You were going to leave without me," she accused Bert Gibson as soon as she was beside him on the front seat. He had cleaned it hastily and awkwardly for Kay's benefit, but only after she opened the side door.

He muttered to himself, "This motor always takes too long to catch."

"I must say, Bert, you've made me thoroughly curious about Miss Storm," Kay told him. "I wouldn't avoid meeting her now for all the tea in China."

Bert Gibson looked reproachfully at her. The motor caught at last, and the station wagon was eased away from the curb to begin the drive to Kay Campbell's destination.

When Kay generally left town, it was in the other direction and toward New York City. She had taken one trip to Albany, though, which she decided was a company town dedicated to Civil Service and absolutely nothing else. During that trip she must have gone through Kinnina, but it hadn't been memorable to her in any way. It turned out to be a town with a large

street and built around a squat ugly old combination of courthouse, City Hall and police station.

Not till the old light brown station wagon had been out of Kinnina for some twenty minutes did Kay get her first glimpse of Storm House. It stood near the top of a hill. Seen through a grove of trees it was a white two-story place that looked too modern for its own good. It seemed like it was all white brick with no windows. There was something indecent about living in a house as private as this one looked. Kay wondered whether it was possible to bring up a child at all well in a house that apparently took in no light from the outside.

The windows had actually been treated with a substance that would hide their existence from an outsider's prying eyes, as Kay discovered while the station wagon was making a semi-circle of the hill. To her, though, there wasn't much difference between coating the windows with some guck or other and living in a house that didn't have any windows whatever.

"The Storms must be very secretive people," Kay said.

Bert Gibson, who had been quiet since the drive started, grunted by way of a reply. Suddenly aware of his momentary bad manners, he made a point of clearing his throat before he said:

"Pretty secretive, I guess."

"What's the boy like?" Kay asked. "I'll probably find out for myself, but you can give me some idea first, if you want to."

"Billy, you mean?" He scowled. "They call him Wink because that's what he said when he tried to speak his name for the first time. Wink is no name to call a kid by, if you ask me. Not a boy, anyhow."

"But what's he like, Bert?"

"He's like everybody else in this house," Bert Gibson said after a pause to think it over. "He's scared."

Kay, listening to him, experienced the gooseflesh

crawl that was supposed to be brought on when someone walked over the ground where she would be buried. It left her alert but exhausted, which wasn't the best frame of mind for what was likely to be a difficult interview.

Bert drove the car into a small outbuilding on the other end of the hill away from the road. Having practically ignored her except for the last few minutes, he continued to leave all Kay's doubts unanswered and devoted himself to handling the old station wagon. Kay waited till he had parked it to his satisfaction and tested the starter some half a dozen times. She was absorbing some of the early spring sunshine, such as it was, when he joined her.

"I'll take you up to the house, Miss," he said.

There was a pebble-shelled path leading from the outbuilding to the rear of Storm House, and a wooden overhang that was supposed to give protection in case of rain or too much sunshine. Kay could see a volley ball court and an unfilled pool at her left as she reached the overhang. At her right, one of the coated windows suddenly slammed shut.

"Who did that?" Kay asked.

"A window-catch has probably gone out of order," Bert Gibson suggested. He looked back at her, smiling vaguely. "Either that, or you've just been welcomed to Storm House."

"I don't understand what you're talking about."

"You will if you stay," Bert Gibson said philosophically. "Otherwise, I don't see how it matters."

Kay wished that the man wasn't always making provocative remarks at a time when she couldn't follow them up. He was leading her into the house now, and it wouldn't do to be arguing with him as they walked inside.

The smell of furniture polish followed them down a long and bare hall, and over to another hall with occasional small tables and some portraits of Storm family

members long dead. In front of one door Gibson stopped, turned to one side and opened it for her.

"Please step in and wait," he said. "I'll tell Miss Jessica that you're here."

Kay nodded. The door closed softly behind her, like animal jaws on fresh meat. She was in a large and comfortable room that could have been transported to a museum. Antiques were everywhere: lamps with massive shades, decanters formed like hourglasses, a porcelain statuette of a pigtailed oriental girl on her haunches, a gilt clock on the wall above the six foot fireplace. There were two separate flower arrangements in the room, and to Kay it seemed significant that the flowers were artificial.

She walked across an Ispahan rug to one of the soft chairs upholstered in yellow. Without being aware of it consciously, Kay had decided that the chair closest to the fireplace would show her most attractively. She settled herself with precision.

"Please be careful while you're in that chair," a woman's voice said icily. "It's worth a good deal of money."

Kay hadn't heard the door open. She had expected to see Rolf Storm along with his sister, but things simply hadn't worked out like that. Jessica Storm stood in the door, a jewelled cigarette holder in one long and graceful hand. Her eyes were like Rolf Storm's, and so was the firm but not aggressive chin. She was dressed in cerise and though it fitted snugly it wasn't quite right for her particular shade of blonde hair.

"You're the one that Rolf found," she said easily in a voice that was only a few tones higher than her brother's. "I assume he convinced you that you'd like to work at Storm House."

"He made the job sound interesting."

"Yes, I suppose it would be all of that if you were hired for it."

She closed the door back of her and walked lightly across the valuable rug. She was careful to drop cigarette ashes into a tray that seemed like a concave harp in miniature. Up to this time, as far as Kay could tell, the other woman hadn't looked carefully at her. Kay's existence was not nearly as important to her as that of the rug, the ash tray, the gleaming porcelains and hooded lamps.

"I take it that you know (or do you?) about the previous governesses. I have no memory for names at all, so I'll have to refer to them by numbers. The first one left in the middle of the night, with all her luggage remaining. The second went into a screaming fit at dinner and swore that some of the furniture had moved. The most recent governess, number three, told me that she couldn't stomach the surroundings for another moment and promptly left my employ. And do you know why all those reactions came about?"

"I can guess."

"Well?"

"Perhaps none of the governesses could stomach the surroundings and most of them made other excuses to leave."

"Meaning that in one way or another Rolf or myself was to blame." Jessica had been looking fixedly at a point above Kay's head, but for the first time she glanced down at the girl's face. "Really, I think this is going to be most amusing."

Kay gritted her teeth, but didn't add to what she had already hinted.

"My brother is convinced that I was responsible indirectly for alienating those women. He doesn't believe in the force that actually rejected all of them."

"And what force is that?"

Jessica raised her hands languidly to indicate what was in the room and beyond it. "The house rejected them. Storm House."

"Really?"

Another glance from Jessica. "At least you don't behave as if you think I've lost my head. I can assure you that Storm House has quite a history of (what should I call it?) expressing disapproval of some who enter it."

"I don't believe in houses with a life of their own," Kay said bluntly. "I prefer to believe in the power of other people rather than the power of things."

She had succeeded in stinging Jessica. A dark flush pulsed in her forehead.

"My brother calls me a thing-lover and not a people-lover," she said. "No wonder he was so attracted to you. He seems to think the same way you do, and having you in the house is likely to be very convenient for him."

Kay gripped the chair arms more firmly, declining to make some angry remark or other and walk out.

"Take your fingers away from that part of the chair," Jessica snapped with more feeling than she had shown to date. "It's much more valuable to me than your comfort."

Kay complied, but made a point of doing it slowly. She rested her elbows near the same points where her fingers had been and folded her hands.

"I understand," Jessica said in her usual patronizing tone of voice, "that there was a window smash just as you reached Storm House. I suppose you think that it was an accident."

"Bert Gibson told me a catch must have broken at some point."

"The printer fellow is as sure as I am that it was the house giving you a warning." Jessica straightened up. "Don't think that Storm House has no life of its own, so to speak, or that the idea is a silly one in this day and age. This house can kill, and it has killed in the past."

Kay shook her head once, but wouldn't argue with one of Jessica Storm's most cherished beliefs.

"I'm not asking for any opinion," Jessica said briskly. "All I'm doing is to tell you what the facts are. You're entitled, I suppose, not to believe a word of it; but you'd never be able to complain later on that no one told you the truth in advance."

"I'll take my chances against a house," Kay half-smiled. "Any old house anywhere."

"I'm sure you would, but I won't. The house has rejected you and that's enough for me."

Kay asked calmly, "Do you really think you have a good excuse to turn me down for the job of governess?"

"Storm House is against you." Jessica shrugged. "It's out of my hands in that case, and I admit I'm a little relieved by the decision."

"Apparently you're glad that the house hates people," Kay said. "I think that at least one person in it is a people-hater, otherwise the house wouldn't be a people-hater. And I think that a house with love in it is built on much better foundation than a house with hate."

"I didn't come in here to talk about love and hate," Jessica Storm rapped out. "I only wanted to let you know the decision."

"Meaning that the house has decided against me and that you agree?"

"Of course. I don't care what arrangements you make to leave Storm House, as long as you leave quickly."

"Just one minute, please."

Half out of the sofa, Jessica Storm paused briefly and then stood up.

"We've said everything there is to say."

"Not just yet, I'm afraid." Kay leaned forward. "I'll walk back to town, if I have to, as soon as I get some confirmation that I'm being turned down for the job."

Jessica was irritated, of course, by such an entirely human reaction. She frowned.

"What *is* all this?" she demanded.

And Kay said carefully, "Before I get away from this place, I want to talk to your brother."

Six

In the light from shaded lamps (no natural light was ever permitted into this room, as Kay found afterwards, because it could possibly harm the furniture or one of the porcelain figures) Jessica Storm's face was briefly ugly. A thin smile played across her lips.

"You know that he's fond of you and so you're convinced he won't say no," she murmured. "For your information, Rolf hasn't ever questioned a decision of mine about household help, and especially since . . ."

She let the words trail off, not bothering to apologize for leaving the thought incomplete.

"You can't see him," Jessica snapped. "He's busy."

"I'm willing to wait."

"It'll take quite a while."

"My time is my own," Kay said. "I'm perfectly willing to sit here and dig my fingers into the armchair till I see him."

"You won't—" Jessica bared her teeth in a snarl, then stepped back. Her cigarette had burned down and she extinguished it meticulously.

With more calmness than she felt Kay said, "I don't like the idea of having been brought all the way out here and being turned down with what I consider as complete nonsense instead of getting a good reason."

"Very well," Jessica gave in coldly. "My brother is in the garage and talking to Gibson. You'll have to see him there."

Her eyes raked Kay as she gave unspoken agreement to the other woman's plans. She stood up and walked

across the lovely Ispahan rug. Kay was at the door of the room at the exact moment that a thumping sound could plainly be heard from above.

"Who's that?" she asked.

The boy, probably." Jessica Storm's nerves were drawn taut. "Get out of here and over to the garage."

Something heavy had been set down on the floor in the room overhead. About to push Kay out if necessary, Jessica Storm glanced back swiftly to make sure that none of its precious antiques had been disturbed as a result of sound waves.

If Kay hadn't been in this room at the moment she wouldn't have heard the curious sound that followed the first one. It was as if some heavy human being was crawling across the floor in the room over her head.

"That's a grown person," Kay pointed out. "I want to know if your brother is up there."

She let herself be motioned forcefully out past the door. Behind her, Jessica closed and locked it.

"If you go upstairs," she warned, "I'll have you arrested for trespassing."

"Maybe so, but I'll have been up there first."

The stairs, carpeted and wooden, were at the far end of the hall. As Kay hurried to them she heard Jessica's steps back of her.

The second floor hallway was small and narrow, with framed lithographs on the somber wall. Dust spots whirled in the sun's rays through the partly open window. The sounds of motion came from back of the third brown-painted door to Kay's left.

She knocked on it, but there was no response. She moved the knob back and forth half a dozen times before realizing that the door was firmly locked.

Back of her Jessica asked bitterly, "Are you satisfied now?"

"I want to talk to him."

"The door is locked on the inside and nobody has the key except Rolf. I can give you my word that he won't

be out of there for several hours, and by that time he'll be in the wrong mood to talk with anybody."

"There's no reason why I should take your word about a single solitary thing."

"All right," Jessica said, too amused for once to get angry. "Talk to him. Go ahead and talk to him right now. I'm really looking forward to this."

Kay turned to face the door.

"Mr. Storm? This is Kay Campbell, the girl you asked to come here and work with your nephew. Do you remember me, Mr. Storm?"

There was no response in words, but Kay did get the strong impression that the movements across the floor had become muted.

"Please give me a few minutes of your time, Mr. Storm, and let me in. Your sister is with me."

A sound that was a cross between murmur and gasp came from inside at the mention of Rolf Storm's sister, but that was the only response.

Kay looked half-hopefully back at Jessica. Under a cap of bright blonde hair, the older woman's face reflected an amused condescension.

Kay said firmly, "I'll stay here till I get more of a reaction out of him, and I don't care how long it takes."

Jessica sighed but moved nearer to the door, as Kay had expected.

"Rolf, dear, this is Jessica."

At the familiar voice, all stirring in the other room was stopped. The rising, deep-throated murmur of question made it clear to Kay that it was indeed Rolf Storm on the other side of the door. But Kay wished that she could control the movements of her fingers as if she was playing a piano.

"Rolf, dear, I'm being such a nuisance because there's a very determined young girl here and she insists on having the answer to a question. You probably remember that you wanted some new governess for

Wink to come out here and be interviewed. Do you remember that, Rolf?"

An affirmative grunt came only after a pause.

"Now, Rolf, what I want you to do is to tell this young lady that she's not suitable for the job."

Another grunt from inside the room.

Kay said, "Do you think I shouldn't get the job, Mr. Storm, because the house has rejected me? That's what your sister claims, and I want to know if you're in agreement with her."

Softly, Jessica said, "Yes, Rolf dear, tell the young lady that you agree."

Kay couldn't mistake the affirmative nature of the response, this time. She threw her head back sharply, and wondered if asking Jessica to intercede hadn't made all the difference in Rolf Storm's reactions.

When she heard herself step back firmly from the door, she realized that as much as she needed a job now the verdict did make her feel better. No girl could teach in a household like this one. The job couldn't have been kept for as much as a week, not with a strong-willed woman who covered her hatred of others by a layer of superstition, and a weak-willed brother who said exactly what the woman wanted to hear.

Rolf Storm, though, hadn't seemed to Kay like a weak-willed man by any manner of means. Not that it made much difference, now.

"The sooner I get out of here," Kay remarked bluntly, "the better I'll like it."

Jessica didn't acknowledge that, but said something to her brother while Kay was walking to the stairs. She decided to leave this house by the front entrance if only to see how the larger rooms were furnished. As she turned past the bottom step, Jessica snapped: "The back way out for you, of course."

Kay chose not to dignify the matter by any talk whatever, and took a step leading to the back entrance. She didn't take a second step, though. As she shifted

her weight to the right foot, she heard a child call out with terror. She whirled around, convinced that the scream had come from the direction opposite to the one in which she had been headed.

"What are you doing?" Jessica demanded.

Kay ran. There was a long narrow hall that finally widened and then came to a stop in front of a huge living room. She managed to catch a glimpse of it and see that it was furnished comfortably, but was unable to make out a single item. Nor did she try. The old-fashioned main door stretched open ahead of her. Watery sunshine forced her to make a semicircle of one hand above her eyes as she looked around anxiously to find the child who had called out with such fear.

The boy stood at a point midway between two jagged patches of grass. He was bent over, and dark-blond hair flew in the wind. A wedge of knitted red tie could be seen under the left side of his face. He was rocking himself back and forth.

Kay ran the twenty feet from the house where he stood and knelt down before him.

"What's wrong, Wink?" she asked softly. "I'm Miss Campbell and you can tell me what's wrong."

The head straightened up, and Kay could have sworn that she saw terror alive in those violet eyes. Wink Storm was a fair-faced child, and red splotches on his soft cheeks showed that he'd been in tears.

"The first thing to do is blow your nose," Kay said practically, searching a piece of Kleenex out of her handbag and wrapping one side of it on the lower half of Wink's nose. "Blow, Wink."

During a pause she was aware of the boy's eyes searching her face. He blinked several times before he finally blew his nose. It was a sign to Kay that for the moment she was trusted.

"Good," Kay said, wiping his nose and then dabbing a tip of the same Kleenex against the moist corners of his eyes. "Now tell me what happened, Wink. What

made you shout so much, a grown boy of eight like you?"

"I—I—it—"

"Go on, Wink," Kay said patiently.

"It—it came at me and I knew it was gonna get me real bad."

"What came at you, Wink?"

He started to raise a hand with the forefinger extended, then froze. A shadow had appeared on the hand as he stood there, covering him up to the shoulder.

Jessica said lazily, "Wink, you're being a nuisance again and bothering Aunt Jessica. You know you mustn't do that, don't you? Well? Don't you?"

The boy nodded slowly, a movement that had been forced out of him under torture. Then he turned toward Kay, who was looking at him with sympathetic concern. He put out his arms and ran two steps to her, hugging her and burying his head against her neck. His body shook but he didn't cry out, probably because his aunt was so near him. Kay could feel the boy's open mouth warm against her neck, the small wet pointed teeth pressing his lips. She held him tightly, hoping to give him some security if only for a little while.

Jessica said flatly, "Should this disgusting emotional display be over with, Miss whatever-your-name-is, I'll thank you to leave as soon as possible. That's the way you told me you wanted it, if I remember. The point is simply that you aren't welcome here."

Kay didn't let go of the child. With his body trembling against hers, his need for love and protection so clear, Kay knew that though she had turned down the governess job herself in a moment of disgust some way had to be found for her to help this terrified child.

"It's gone far enough," Jessica snapped. "If you're going to stay here all day embracing the boy, then I can assure you that you'll spend the next day in prison. The Storm family still carries some weight in this county."

At the first sound of Jessica's voice beginning a new sentence, Wink gripped Kay's shoulders as tightly as he could. Kay stroked him gently to show that she understood and sympathized with his dismay.

Rather than behave toward Kay as if the young girl was capable of prolonged resistance to her wishes, Jessica gave in petulantly. "I'll send that printer fellow over to the garage. If you're there when he gets to it, he'll drive you to the nearest bus stop in town. I'll give him his orders right now."

She turned on her heels and hurried back into the house, possibly to give herself more time for reexamining the antique objects in the room that Kay had entered.

Kay finally eased the child away from her. Wink snuffled and turned toward the outbuilding which housed the garage.

"Are you going?"

"Yes, Wink, it looks like I'll have to."

She wanted to tell him that she'd try to come back at another time, but it would've been cruel to let the boy feel confidence without more cause. This child had already experienced too much betrayal from too many grownups.

"Oh," Wink said. He bit his lower lip.

"You were going to tell me what made you so frightened, dear. Do you remember you were going to tell me?"

"Yes."

She was dealing with a child and she'd have to go forward slowly, getting to one point at a time.

"What was it, then, Wink?"

"I was near the house when I heard it and I ran away."

He pointed toward the right side of the house. A white brick lay on a patch of earth.

"That?" Kay asked. She could feel the hair rise

slowly on the back of her neck. "You 'heard' it? It 'came at' you, Wink, as you said before?"

"Well, it was over my head, you know, and it made a funny sound. It's the same as whistling, almost, when it's above your head."

Kay drew out a hand and rubbed the top of Wink's head. He tried to answer her smile, but looked down at the grass below.

"I'm sure it was an accident," Kay said. "It won't happen again."

"Aunt Jessica thinks it's my fault when something happens," the boy said. "She thinks that Storm House is after me, sort of. You know what I mean?"

"Has that woman been repeating her poisonous nons——? Never mind, dear. What does your uncle say about it? Does he agree with your Aunt Jessica?"

"Uncle Rolf used to fight with her. He never used to believe any of that junk."

But the boy looked around with haste to be sure that his aunt was out of earshot. When he turned back to Kay, he couldn't help seeming relieved.

"Why doesn't your uncle argue about it any more?"

"I don't know. Every day he goes up to his room for hours and hours by himself, except sometimes Bert goes in. When Uncle Rolf comes down he's very (you know what I mean?) blahhh! Like he doesn't care about anything."

Kay asked out of curiosity, "What does your uncle do when he's alone in that room?"

"I don't know. I asked him once and he said he talks to somebody called Rembran."

"Do you mean Rembrandt? The painter?"

"I don't know who he is, but I know Uncle Rolf is alone in that room so he couldn't really talk to nobody," Wink said firmly. "Uncle Rolf is a painter, too, you know."

"No, I didn't have the slightest idea," Kay said.

The boy looked as if he wasn't going to lose control of himself, so she ventured to stand up. She'd have liked nothing better than to take the boy away from Storm House forever. It was no residence for a growing child, heaven knew. The very least she could do, though, would be to give the child some distraction for even a short time.

"Let's go over to the garage and then we'll take a ride into town," she said. "Bert can bring you back. Won't that be fun?"

"Will Bert take me?"

"Of course. Now let's go over to the garage and wait for him."

Kay had half-expected that the boy would hold her hand by way of being helped over the terrain; she might have known instead that Wink was much more able to walk the area than she was. While he alternated running and skipping, singing the words of a television commercial during his progress, Kay had all the work cut out for her to keep from falling.

They circled the house near its base and came to the outbuilding with a sloping roof. The outsized rear door was open on three cars, one of which was the battered light brown station wagon in which Kay had been brought out here.

Wink's capering stopped when he was in the garage. Sunny optimism left him to be replaced by some mood that wasn't quite apprehension (Kay didn't know the child well enough to be able to tell exactly what he felt), but seemed close to it.

"Aunt Jessica won't like this," he said softly.

"She'll have forgotten it by the time you get back," Kay assured him. "Besides, Wink, you're not a prisoner here, are you?"

"N-no."

"What does that mean, 'N-no'?"

"I'm not in chains or always in my room, but every-

body's funny about me leaving the grounds. They don't want me to."

"Never, you mean?"

"Well, I don't go to school. If the circus or a rodeo or something good comes to town, I can't go."

"Doesn't your uncle take you?"

"No, he's just like Aunt Jessica. He says things like I'll get home too late at night if I go, and the town is dangerous. You know, like on television. You could get shot or something."

"Don't you have any friends?" Kay asked wonderingly.

"Jerry Manton comes over sometimes. His folks live in Periwinkle; that's the next house down the road toward town. Jerry gets taken into town real often, and he even goes to the town school. What's a school really like?"

Kay's forefingers darted to the corners of her eyes and she had to take a deep breath before she could give the child some answer.

"Well, it's a building with rooms in it and there's a different group of children with a teacher in every room."

"A hundred kids, maybe?" Wink asked with awe. "Has the whole school got a hundred kids in it? Jerry says there's a lot more kids in it than a hundred, but he's always telling some stories."

"He's right about that."

"I never saw so many kids, ever."

"Tell me something." She knelt down beside him again. "When did you leave Storm House last? I mean, Wink, the house and grounds."

Wink preened himself at being the focus of Kay's sympathetic attention, puffing out his chest and at the same time trying to look as if the agonies of the damned had been inflicted on him.

"A long time," he said proudly. "Years and years and years. Maybe even fifty years."

"Oh Wink, you little idiot!" Kay patted the top of his head affectionately and rose to her full height. "Today's going to be the day you go to Kinnina for a little while, anyhow."

"Do you promise?"

"Either you go into town, or I'll raise the darnedest fuss you ever saw."

Footsteps could be heard in the scrub grass outside. Wink turned, his hand raised hospitably.

"H'lo, Bert," he called.

"Hello, Billy."

In a proud aside to Kay, the boy said, "He calls me *Billy*." Once more he raised his voice. "I'm going to Kinnina today."

"You are?" Bert Gibson came into Kay's sight now. He had put on a windbreaker and it was the same color as his sunburned face. His eyes narrowed. "Who told you that?"

Kay said, "I did. You can take the boy into Kinnina for the drive and bring him back. He just had a fright not long ago, and some change of scene will do him good."

"I have a lot of errands to do in Kinnina, Miss," Bert Gibson said hurriedly. "I don't know that there's any extra time. In fact, I'm sure there isn't."

Wink called out, "She says that if you don't take me she'll give you a lot of trouble. She says so."

Kay would have rebuked the child for talking too much, if there had been any point to it just then. She was wondering whether she could explain to Bert that she was doing it for the child he himself seemed to be fond of, and that she was hoping to talk with him about the wretchedly unhealthy situation in which Wink was being brought up.

Bert Gibson took a deep breath. He had reached a point less than a foot from the door handle, and very few more steps would have brought him into the ga-

rage. He stopped himself, though. One of his hands reached out for the huge garage door and he stepped back and out of sight. The door creaked gratingly when he suddenly closed it, automatically locking Kay inside with the child.

There was a moment's frozen silence, and then Kay heard the man's footsteps receding hurriedly into the distance.

Seven

If Kay had followed the dictates of her Scots' temper she would have begun pounding at the door. As it was, and realizing that she couldn't let herself worry the child, she made sure that the dusty window was open (this outbuilding had probably been converted to a garage after being used for other purposes) and smiled down at Wink.

"I guess we'll have to wait till Bert comes back."

Wink had already seen a way out for the two of them. "We can always climb through there."

He was pointing to the window.

Kay said, "Of course we can, but it's not necessary. Bert will be back in a little while."

Wink asked, "Why did Bert lock the door on us?"

To keep him from losing his delicate self-control, Kay said:

"It's part of a game."

Wink accepted this optimistic explanation as if it had to be the right one.

"What happens next?"

"You'll see."

"When?"

"Very soon now, I promise."

"When is that?"

"Please be quiet, dear," Kay said pleasantly. "I have a slight headache, I think."

It had occurred to her, almost as an afterthought, that working with a child in a school situation and working with him at home were two entirely different problems. Because she was firm with a child on its best behavior in a non-home situation didn't necessarily mean that she'd be good with a child in his native environment. Being a good teacher wouldn't seem to have much to do with being a good mother to children of her own, she guessed.

But she couldn't stop herself from worrying about this situation, no matter what else she tried to think about by way of occupying her mind otherwise. The hard truth was that she had been locked in as soon as she had indicated her strong wish to take the boy into the nearest town if only for a little while. Bert Gibson, a hired man who was strongly aware that he was a servant, hadn't hesitated more than a moment before he acted against Kay. Which meant, then, that he was under orders not to let Wink go into Kinnina for any reason.

But why was the child being kept a prisoner?

She heard footsteps outside and ran to the window. She was able to see Bert Gibson on his way to the outbuilding at a slow pace. It took several moments of watching before she realized why he was taking his time. At every rough patch of ground he had to turn back and give a hand to Jessica Storm, who was behind him.

Jessica was doing her best to walk the rough ground as if it were a not too crowded ballroom. One end of the jewelled cigarette holder was set firmly between her lips, and she still wore the cerise dress Kay had seen at the interview with her. Jessica would have been smarter, Kay thought, not to let herself go into the fresh air with an outfit that had obviously been

planned for use in lushly furnished rooms. This woman simply didn't care, though. She wore what she pleased, whether she looked well in it or not, and in exactly the surroundings in which she wanted to wear it.

A split-second before Jessica reached ground level with the outbuilding, Kay saw that she had put on flat slippers as some concession to the outside world. But Jessica almost managed to walk as gracefully as if she was in high heels.

Kay's eyes caught Jessica firmly during the short walk to the door, but Jessica simply looked away. It was as if she had always been used to the stares of those whom she considered as her social and intellectual inferiors.

Behind Kay, a car horn blared out. She whirled around to see that Wink had managed to reach one car's wheel and was pressing the horn gleefully. At Kay's sharp command he turned away from that car and ran to another one. He was pressing this second horn when the key turned in the lock of the oversized garage door.

Kay caught his attention and put a finger to her lips for silence. Wink nodded and reluctantly moved away from the car. There was a bathroom at the farthest end of the garage, and he suddenly rushed toward it.

"Need a drink of water," he called back over a shoulder.

The outer door creaked as it opened. Bert Gibson was still drawing the door back when Jessica walked regally into the garage.

She looked from right to left.

"Wink?" she called out. "Where are you?"

"I'll be right there, Aunt Jessica," the boy answered from behind the closed bathroom door. The grownups could hear water from a tap being run at full pressure into a glass. "Okay if I take a drink, Aunt Jessica?"

His aunt chose not to answer that. She glanced at Kay.

"Bert will take you into town now."

"Not so fast," Kay said, the desire for battle strong in her voice. "I want to know why I was locked in here and why the child is being kept a prisoner."

Bert Gibson, coming into the garage, said quickly, "I did it because I didn't want to have to explain that nobody is supposed to take young Billy away from the grounds. I figured you'd sure be close by when I brought Miss Jessica over here to tell you that, herself —I mean, when I asked Miss Jessica to come over here."

Jessica said idly to him, "There's no need to tell her anything. Just because the girl speaks English correctly, she can intimidate you."

"Sorry, Miss Jessica," Bert Gibson murmured.

"And so you should be," Jessica snapped. "But for a start, you can take her away from here."

"Not so fast," Kay said. "I still want to know why the child is being kept a prisoner and not able to leave the grounds under any circumstances. I can't think of any good reason even for you to be so fantastically cruel to a child."

Jessica flicked ash from her cigarette and glanced at the station wagon as if not a word had been said. Bert Gibson, unsettled by having been criticized, said nothing in the way of an explanation this time.

"Take the station wagon, Bert," Jessica instructed him, "You can pick up those supplies I need while you're in town."

Over Bert Gibson's footsteps as he trudged obediently to the station wagon, Kay said: *"I'm* not going to leave till I hear some sort of valid reason for such a barbaric way of bringing up the child."

"One more thing, Bert," Jessica said, and waited till the printer-handyman stopped and looked around at her. "If you're asked any questions, simply tell whoever asks you that it's none of her business. That's all you have to do."

"Yes, Miss Jessica."

"All right, Bert. Get busy, now."

Kay expected Jessica to turn and try to leave. Jessica didn't take a step in that direction till she finished giving Bert Gibson his final instructions for the trip. It wouldn't be long now before she'd get out of here.

Kay waited till she saw Jessica Storm's back to her, then said:

"It may be none of my business, but I think that a children's court judge would certainly be interested to hear what you're doing to raise the child."

Jessica whirled around, the first reaction of anger from her that Kay had seen in all this time. She stood with feet close together, the cigarette pointed outwards as if it were a weapon.

In the silence, Kay added evenly, "Your brother is the child's guardian, and he's responsible to a judge if he handles the boy badly. It seems to me like he's doing exactly that."

Jessica stubbed out her cigarette in the car tray of a Chevvy. She did it carefully, obviously hating to destroy a product even as fragile as a cigarette. The jewelled holder glittered emptily in one hand when she turned back to Kay.

"So it makes threats, does it?" she asked softly.

"*I* make threats," Kay corrected her, "and only if I'm willing to carry them out."

"You want me to explain the Storm House situation in the closest possible detail," Jessica said calmly. "Well, I'll see you cut into little pieces before I say so much as a single word to you about a private matter."

"You'll be hearing from a judge, then," Kay remarked. She called out, "I'm ready, Bert. I'll leave, after all."

Wink was waiting before the station wagon.

"I'm afraid I owe you an apology," Kay said regretfully. "You can't go along on this trip."

Wink's face didn't change, but the lips drew more tightly together.

"Next time, huh?" he asked softly. "Everybody always tells me that next time I'll go here and or there and do this or the other thing. It always ends up with me staying home, but I'm waiting for it to be different sometimes."

Jessica said loudly, "Wink, I want you to run up to the house this minute. *Now,* do you hear? Go there right now and wait for me."

"Yes, Aunt Jessica, right now."

He raised a hand to the level of his chest as a goodbye for Kay, then left the garage. Instead of running, though, Kay noticed that he had chosen to walk at a quick tempo. His pace picked up again when he was outside. Jessica turned to watch him till he was out of sight and couldn't be taken even briefly from the grounds, as Kay had wanted.

The station wagon motor suddenly coughed and sputtered into life.

"Jessica ordered, "Wait with that motor for awhile."

The motor went dead instantly.

Kay said, "You've made your point, and I understand that I'm not welcome here. Are you going to keep me from leaving?"

"Yes," said Jessica Storm. She raised a hand, forestalling an expression of surprise from Kay. "Only till I'm finished saying one thing. I have no intention of discussing any Storm family matters with you, but my brother may feel differently about it. I don't know how long a time it will take before Rolf is ready for face-to-face conversation, but if you're willing to stay here until he comes I won't make any objection."

"I'll stay."

"You realize that I can't keep Bert at your beck and call forever," Jessica remarked with a grim smile. "If Bert isn't available when you've had your little conver-

sation with my brother, you may have to walk into Kinnina."

"If that's the case, I'm willing to walk."

"Good. Bert, I'm going to want you back by . . . oh no, I forgot. You have to go upstairs to the print shop now, don't you?"

"I'm afraid so, Miss Jessica. I didn't want to mention it before, but I was sure you'd remem- —"

"All right, go up there, then. I don't want you talking to this girl and being twisted around her finger. She'll have plenty of time to wait and decide whether or not she wants to see Rolf at all."

"If she does," Rolf Storm said from the doorway, "I'm here to be seen."

Kay's first thought was to feel surprise at not having heard him approach. Her second was to realize that the man looked tired. He was standing against the natural light and it was necessary to blink time and again in order to see his face with any clarity, but it was easy to make out his jaw hanging slackly and the new lines that seemed to have appeared overnight under his eyes. His face was as white as the drawing paper that he carried unfolded beneath his right arm.

"A superlative entrance," Jessica Storm murmured. "You must have run like the wind to get here so quickly."

"I was leaving my room when the boy came over and told me that there was some kind of a three-ring argument going on down here. I came over more quickly than I had expected to, otherwise."

"Much more quickly." Jessica's glance raked his crumpled shirt and shiny jeans. "You look like something in a bird cage."

"I dress for comfort, Jessica, and you ought to know it by this time." His eyes, still sharp in spite of his tiredness, rested perplexedly on Kay. "You're the new teacher, aren't you?"

"I was supposed to be," Kay said tartly.

"Oh? I assume that you and Jessica have been going at each other like cat and cat."

"You're half right."

His smile was close to being genuine. "Well, wait here for me and I'll arbitrate this labor dispute as soon as I get down again."

He walked slowly to a door beside the bathroom and opened it. His footsteps ascended wooden stairs that echoed his own tiredness by creaking wearily when he touched any of them with a shoe sole.

Wonderingly Kay asked Jessica, "Doesn't he remember talking to us through the door?"

Jessica waved that question to one side, as if it didn't have any importance to her. She was walking up and down the garage, the cigarette holder clamped between her teeth.

Rolf Storm's footsteps could be heard down the stairs by the time ten minutes had been passed in the garage. He had tucked in his shirt, and left the drawing paper upstairs in the print shop. A fresh chalky stain had appeared between the first and second fingers of his right hand, and another smear on the tip of a nostril.

He waited for Kay or his sister to start talking, but there was no response to the unspoken invitation or his affable smile.

"Let's agree that the two of you hate each other's guts," he said. "Jess, you've sent other teachers out of here on one excuse after another, but we need somebody and I think an exception ought to be made in this case."

"Not with her," Jessica snapped.

"Well, the kid seems to like her," Rolf Storm pointed out. "You can't say he felt that way about any of the others, and I think we ought to take it into consideration."

"Do you want the boy to decide who will have authority over him?"

"I think so, yes," Rolf Storm said.

"And on that basis, Rolf, you're willing to hire this woman against my expressed wishes?"

"Jess, you'd be against any woman who 'intruded' at Storm House," Rolf Storm told her patiently. "You know it, I know it, and so does the young lady by now, I'm sure. Miss—ah, Campbell, how do you feel about taking the job?"

Kay started to remind him that he had apparently agreed in the past with his sister's decision against hiring one certain governess. It did seem that when Rolf Storm was in his room at certain times during the day he wasn't in full control of his faculties. Not for a moment did Kay doubt any longer that Storm House was a hellish home in which to bring up a sensitive boy like Wink.

She answered truthfully, "I'd like to help the child."

"Then I take it that you cordially reciprocate my sister's feelings about you, and that I myself wouldn't win a popularity contest if you were one of the judges; that's the impression I get from your tone of voice. Well, Miss Campbell, from your point of view I can't honestly say I blame you."

"If you can explain something to my satisfaction," Kay said, "I'll take the job."

"What is it you want to know? Please make it brief. I have a hunch I'll be leaving very soon."

"I want to know why Wink isn't allowed to spend any time away from Storm House and its grounds."

"For a very good reason," Rolf Storm began. "I wouldn't be a disciplinarian in that matter (or any other, Miss Campbell, as you can probably guess) if it wasn't strictly necessary."

"You've explained nothing to me, so far."

"The boy's life is being threatened," Rolf Storm

said. He lifted his head to look at the ceiling; a sound like muffled roaring had started to come from the print shop. "I'll be going upstairs now, Miss Campbell. Why don't you have dinner with us? We can go into the whole matter afterwards."

Without giving Kay the chance to make another remark, Rolf Storm hurried as best he could over to the staircase. He took the first few steps two at a time, then eased the pace considerably to get to the top.

"Well I'll be darned," Kay said in awe of the man's behavior from first to last, and wished she could've brought herself to use a stronger oath. "Well I'll be *darned!*"

Eight

"IT'S BEEN four months since we've known that the boy was in danger," Rolf Storm said, crossing his legs and looking pointblank at Kay. "The child needs more protection than my sister or I can give him, and he needs a good teacher—or, if you like the word instead, governess. I couldn't care less, Miss Campbell, what your title may be. My sister is the Storm who worries about such crucial points."

It was half-past seven, and darkness had fallen outside. Kay had spent some time during what'd been left of the afternoon in looking over the grounds and getting to know the child as well as she could. Wink, as she had already guessed, was an imaginative boy of considerable intelligence. He was convinced that he'd grow up to be a space scientist. Indeed his scientific knowledge was formidable for an eight year old, but such acquaintance as he'd made with English and geography was only rudimentary.

Dinner had been a silent meal by any standards, ex-

cept for Wink's explanations of a recent space feat performed by the Russians. Kay couldn't follow the details at all, and Rolf Storm's eyes became glazed over when the boy was well into his explanation. It was Jessica who stopped Wink with a few sharp words. The boy fidgeted with his meal and left dessert uneaten. He told the other diners that he was going to talk to Bert Gibson about "something important". No doubt the printer-handyman would soon find himself listening to an explanation of space mechanics that would be as complete as Wink was able to make it.

Rolf Storm was leading Kay down the long well-lit hall to what he called "the poker deck of the good ship Storm House" when Kay suddenly stopped to look at the lithographs on the walls. Her mouth opened wide.

"Who—who did these?" she asked after awhile.

"I did. Do you like them? No, I guess you don't."

"They frighten me."

"Oh? And why would that be?"

"The form is so loose, so irresponsible," she said carefully. "There's no pattern to them that I can make out. They're chaotic."

"It's a chaotic world, Miss Campbell. Trying to understand other people, let alone their artistic output, isn't something that can be done in seconds."

"But the way you show that people don't communicate (that's the fashionable word, isn't it?) is by not communicating, either. That's much too easy, Mr. Storm, for a craftsman."

He threw his head back and laughed. When he was in control of himself again he asked gravely:

"What would your lithographs be about, Miss Campbell, if you were an artist?"

"Good relations between people," Kay said after a pause to think about the question. "For every distorted relationship there must be any number of good healthy ones."

"Your ideal in painting, then, is what you might call chocolate-box art. Is that right?"

"If that's what you'd call artistic work that deals with the normal world such as most of us know, yes. There ought be a lot more chocolate box art if it's true that art is supposed to reflect life and not the feelings of men and women who are bored with living."

"Do you know what's wrong with the way you think, Miss Campbell? You're an anachronism. You want to turn time backwards. You want to gear modern minds to the days when people wore spats and handlebar mustaches, and every tobacco store had a sculpture of an Indian in front of it."

"Why? Because I'm convinced that people can be good to each other?"

"Because you forget that we're living in an age devoted to selfishness. People accept it that if you profess a warm feeling for someone you're doing it for a selfish reason. The highest morality is selfishness, Miss Campbell, according to modern thought. The world has been conquered by such philosophers as Ayn Rand, like it or not. And here you come along to talk about normal relationships and (by implication, at least) unselfish love. You belong with the dodo bird and other extinct animals, Miss Campbell, I'm afraid."

Kay said calmly, "I wish I could introduce you to my parents. They're the two most devoted and sane people that you could ever meet, and they throw all your theories into a cocked hat where they belong."

His gentle mockery faded momentarily and he grinned at her. "Now that we understand each other, we can at least be on first-name terms. All right? Fine, Kay. Let me take you into the poker room and we can do our really serious talking in there."

"The child was leading a reasonably normal life till four months ago," Rolf Storm said, shifting his body for comfort in one of the Spanish Renaissance chairs

colored to match the deep red curtains against the picture window. "He'd never been to school, that's true enough; but he'd be taken into town pretty often and he went to parties with other children. He wasn't supervised too strictly because I'm a live-and-let-live type, and my sister isn't that interested in Wink."

"He gave me the impression," Kay said, her heels tap-tapping against one of the squares on the marble floor, "that he's always been cooped up like this. I suppose, though, that children have very little sense of time."

"That's the answer, of course." Rolf Storm rubbed his outthrust chin thoughtfully. "At any rate, four months ago the boy was nearly killed when he was in Kinnina. A ladder fell very close to him, and half an inch could have made the difference to us between life and death."

"'To us,'" Kay said carefully, "meaning yourself and your sister."

"Oh, yes. I'm Wink's guardian, and I have been since his parents died in a plane crash. The court pays me to take care of Wink. If anything happens to him, then Jessica and I would need a new source of income."

"So you're protecting the child because you live off him?"

"My sister and I both happen to believe that selfishness is the highest emotion which a human being can aspire to." His brief smile faded under Kay's disapproval. "I've been a reasonably successful painter in my time, and in the last few years I've been free to make some radical experiments along the line of the lithographs you don't like."

"Tell me about the threats to Wink."

"They consist of two more near-fatal accidents at Kinnina, one of which killed another child. The coincidence was overpowering, of course. I decided, very

much to my sister's regret, that the boy had to be isolated. I hired Bert Gibson as a handyman because he's powerful and has a license to carry a gun and is a good shot."

"You mean," Kay said carefully, "just in case of trouble?"

Her hands were tight on the gilded knobs of the Spanish Renaissance chair. She was painfully conscious of the darkness in the picture window beyond her host, and the tweedy comfortable aroma that emanated from him. Rolf Storm's tolerance of other people's foibles made him a comfortable man with whom to spend time.

She asked, "Do you and Bert Gibson take turns at watching the child?"

"As much as we can, but, of course, we're not able to do everything. We need a teach- —governess who is loyal to him and who he likes. I'm under the distinct impression that you'd fill the first half of the bill, Miss Campbell, as well as already filling the second half."

"You said before that your sister doesn't like the notion of Wink's being confined to the house and grounds. I wonder if you'd tell me why."

"Jessica is convinced that any misfortune befalling a Storm family member is caused by the house." He gestured vaguely around him. "She hasn't been the only one who expects the house to harm Wink, by the way, or any other person who is here. The house has had something of a reputation for malevolence. A colorful history of hatred; but generally the bad things happen to people while they're in the house itself. Jessica would hate to be inconvenienced by the boy's continual presence nearby, which means that she can expect trouble at any hour of the day or night."

"Could you give me some examples of the house itself causing trouble?"

"One of the servants will make a better yarn out of

it than I could," Rolf Storm said lazily. "They love to regale people with horror stories, and it pays them back for any number of petty inconveniences they suffer on the job."

He sat back, closing his eyes. The silence was so complete that Kay could hear her wrist watch tick with gentle persistence. She half expected to hear Bert Gibson firing off a gun or Jessica making some astringent remark or even Rolf Storm grunting inarticulately as he'd done a few hours earlier in his room. She knew much more now than previously about Storm House's residents, and many of their day's actions had become understandable to her; but instead of having been put at ease by the knowledge, her disquiet had increased.

"Do you have any idea who'd want to hurt the boy?"

"If I was certain I'd do something about it," Rolf Storm told her. "I know definitely that my sister and I happen to have no interest whatever in doing the child any harm. If anything happens to him, I've got to go back to some reasonably conventional painting for my income."

"And in that case, who would the money go to?"

"A distant relative of the child's mother," Rolf Storm said. "But that certain person is absolutely above suspicion because—well, never mind right now. What matters is that it isn't anybody who was at Storm House this afternoon when the boy was nearly killed."

"You *do* know about that? I was beginning to wonder whether you did or not."

"Bert Gibson was keeping Wink in sight at the time, but he simply doesn't have any idea who could've managed that "accident". What he does know is that somebody placed a brick on a window ledge and that it nearly brained Wink when he was playing near the house. Which seems to mean, as I'm sure you'll appreciate, that whoever is after the child has got easy

access to Storm House. It also means that the boy has to be watched more carefully than ever, and that he needs a new governess right away to help in the watching. That's the reason, frankly, why I'm in such a hurry to wrap up the deal, so to speak."

"You'd rule out the possibility that what happened to Wink this afternoon could have been accidental?"

"Too many accidents, Kay, are not accidental." Rolf Storm leaned forward till his face was near the arrangement of artificial flowers on the round mosaic cocktail table between them. "How do you feel about taking the job?"

"Of course I'll take it if you'll have me."

"I'm glad to hear that, Kay." He sounded worried, though. "There's one other point which you may not have considered carefully or even at all, as far as I know."

Kay waited. Rolf Storm sat back, his eyes closed, and moved his right hand in a semicircle to his speech rhythms as if he were conducting an orchestra.

"The boy's life is in danger from somebody who has at least occasional access to Storm House," he said. "As a result, we can be pretty sure another attempt will be made, and soon. We have to agree that you wouldn't be with him at any unusual times; we don't want the boy to think that he's living in a glass case. But you'll be in his company for a large number of his waking hours, and an accident might be made to happen during that time."

"I'd protect the boy as best I can," Kay said carefully. "You must realize that by now."

"I suppose I do." The tired smile was back on his face. "According to drama, this is the time of the anti-hero and the sympathetic villain in the theatre of the absurd; but you insist on wanting to help a strange child even though you might be risking your own life."

Kay blinked. "What did you say?"

"If you're with Wink when another 'accident' takes place, you may very possibly lose your life."

It was true, of course, as Kay realized, but her response was given without second thought.

"I'll take care of the child," she said fiercely, "and myself, too, while I'm at it."

Part Two
OPEN YOUR HAND AND CLOSE YOUR EYES

Nine

BERT GIBSON drove Kay home that night. It was a silent drive, with Bert relatively at ease once he knew that Kay wasn't going to put any strain on him by making conversation.

He picked her up next morning in a highly polished Chevvy and drove her out to Storm House along with luggage enough for a week's stay. She had decided to keep her apartment in Garden and make up her mind during the course of a week as to whether or not she'd be permitted to do an effective job with Wink.

She was with him till three o'clock on the first day, mostly drilling English verbs into him. Never before had she worked with only one child, and the contrast needed more of a readjustment from Kay than she could have expected in advance. For one point, Wink owned a ferocious looking chocolate-brown bulldog named Satellite. Wink stubbornly refused to pay attention to his lessons unless Satellite was close by, and Kay had to agree about letting him have his way in this matter. She didn't appreciate listening to the dog's snuffles and yawns, though, while trying to explain English grammar to the child.

They had been taking lessons in the summerhouse, which was on flat land that belonged to the Storms along with the hilly segment. While Wink and Satellite went meditatively into the house for lunch, under Kay's watchful eyes, she herself was served in the summerhouse. Arlene, the young maid, served from a tray put up on the table at which Kay and Wink had been

working. The maid was a dark-haired girl who'd be plump in a very short time if she stopped dieting rigorously.

Kay asked, "Did Miss Storm tell you to wait on me out here?"

Arlene looked embarrassed. "Yes, Miss."

"It'll be fine for this afternoon," Kay said, not wanting the girl to be ill at ease, "but not for tomorrow. I'll be eating in the house from now on."

"Yes, Miss."

Kay poured coffee for herself and buttered her toast, then paused to look out. Storm House was attractive under the bright April sun, and Kay realized that it was a good time and place for her to find out about Storm House's history. Rolf Storm had clearly told her that the servants loved to talk about it.

She said directly, "I understand that Storm House has a bad reputation."

"Oh, yes'm," Arlene said, gratified that the new governess appeared to know so little about the place. "When Storm House doesn't like somebody it strikes her dead. Or just about. I've lived in Kinnina my whole life long, Miss, and believe me I grew up with my folks telling me that if I didn't behave myself they'd take me to Storm House and lock me inside it forever."

"But what has actually happened?" Kay asked. "I'm not too clear about that."

Arlene talked for ten minutes. She repeated the stories about the movie actress who was unable to spend a night in the place and about the fire at "Bootsie" Storm's party for other flappers during the Nineteen twenties. From then on, going backwards in time, Arlene talked about the post-Civil War episode when Hezekiah Hopkins spent a week as caretaker of the house, and the fact that Rudolph Arlington Storm was killed while writing a letter that would offer his undercover services to the Southern rebels during the war.

Kay waited till the maid had apparently run out of steam. "Is that all?"

"There are a lot of little things, Miss," Arlene said, as if she was offering some tasty morsel from the lunch tray. "When people first come to the place, something bad almost always happens. This house just doesn't like to see strangers at all, Miss. Not at all."

Kay could have added to that particular legend, if she had wanted to; a window catch had broken loose at her first direct approach to the house. Arlene was looking expectantly at her, but Kay decided not to gratify the maid still further. Enough foolishness, in this case, was too much.

"It's been very interesting," Kay said as she finished her second cup of coffee. "Thank you, Arlene, and please send Wink back here. There are a few hundred pointers about the English language that I haven't given him yet."

Nothing was harder to maintain, as Kay found out during the next few days, than an attitude of constant watchfulness. She had always thought of herself as being blessed with more than one girl's share of patience; but waiting for a catastrophe to happen and with no idea of when it might come was enough to strain her patience to its limits.

She developed the habit of writing a letter home every other night, and those letters were the most relaxing times she knew during the next few weeks. Some added pleasure came to her in protracted conversations with Rolf Storm, who was articulate, philosophical, quarrelsome in a charming way, and without an ounce of conceit in him. His tolerance for and understanding of points of view with which he didn't agree was nothing less than extraordinary.

The man would be in his room during the largest part of every other afternoon, as he told Kay. In a lull between work sessions at the summerhouse with Wink,

she'd sometimes look up and see a tired Rolf Storm on his way to the print shop over the garage.

Kay's relations with Jessica, on the other hand, were almost non-existent. She couldn't have spoken as many as fifty words to Rolf's sister by the time she had been working with the child for a week. Their only contact took place at the dinner table. When Jessica wanted a condiment that had been put near Kay, she would stretch out a forefinger rather than ask Kay for the item. Kay would have handed the condiment across, but from his position opposite her Rolf impishly made a game out of it; with a polite inclination of the head toward his sister he would purposely reach out for the wrong item and give it to her. Jessica soon picked up the habit of making sure that all the condiments were near her at the beginning of every meal. Kay never hesitated to ask directly for what she wanted. When Jessica ignored her, Rolf simply walked over to the condiments and brought all of them to his and Kay's side of the table.

If Jessica hadn't been feuding with Kay at this time, though, events at Storm House might have taken an entirely different turn.

As the result of an evening discussion with Rolf Storm, Kay found herself visiting the print shop. A week and a half of hearing about the room over the garage hadn't prepared her for so many presses, gleaming stones, pots of ink and heaven alone knew how much paper scattered higgledy-piggledy on wooden chairs with the tops broken off. Kay's tidy Scottish soul was revolted.

"All this mess for mere lithography?"

"It isn't mere," Rolf said patiently, looking across one of the presses at Kay's white blouse and sky-blue slacks. "Careful you don't smudge yourself."

"I have no intention of doing that," Key said haughtily, tossing her fiery-red hair. "Believe me."

"Lithography, as I was going to say, was used by Toulouse-Lautrec in his time, and by Goya and Daumier in theirs. The process as it works here is pretty simple. I get my ideas up in my room and do a sketch over there."

"Oh. That's why you're uncommunicative when you've locked yourself into your room."

He started to say something else but shrugged and went on, "Then I draw a precise duplicate of the work on one of these flat stones, using a grease pencil. Bert pours water on the stone and then rolls ink on. When he presses paper to the stone after that, the ink prints my drawing for as many copies as I want him to strike."

"I suppose it's lucrative."

"I'm still experimenting with a very special kind of work, and I don't know if what I'm doing will ever pay off."

"Would you mind telling me what it is?"

"Not in the slightest," he said, smiling, "but I think you'd object to hearing it."

"That makes me even more curious."

"I'm simply saying that I think you'd find it objectionable and that the less you know the better off you'll be. If you weren't so infernally—oh, never mind that. We'd only have another argument on top of this one about the worth of lithography."

A number of black-and-white lithographs had been taped to the walls. Kay looked carefully at a couple of them, and then turned away.

"I'm going to leave now," she said quietly.

"Oh? I take it, then, that you loathe these experiments of mine. You've been glaring at them for the last few minutes. At two of them, anyhow."

"I don't have an acquired taste for that sort of work."

"Can you tell me why you hate them? For once in your life, try not to spare somebody else's feelings."

"I didn't even hint that I hate them."

"Obviously, though, you do. Take that one over there, the one with the wobbly square inside the wobbly circle, and the little curlicues around them. Why does it turn your stomach?"

"I can't really explain as well as I'd like to, but—well, it frightens me."

Quietly he asked, "You mean by its strength?"

"No, by its weakness," she said. "Strength isn't frightening in that way. You can meet it head-on or duck from it altogether. Weakness is what's so frightening because you can't make allowances for it or predict the courses it will take."

"So you would argue, I assume, that hatred is a weakness and love is a strength." He raised his hand suddenly as if he was a policeman stopping traffic. "I'm sorry I brought that point up again, even in a new guise. I wanted to ask you about the lithograph and what you see in it."

"Weakness, as I said, amounting almost to—to complete irrationality."

For a moment she had the impression that he was pleased. "You really ought to explain that."

"I'd be perfectly willing, if I could." Kay turned to the door. "All I know is that I don't like any of the work, Mr. Storm, and that I'm going to leave this room."

"I certainly couldn't stop you from going, but I do want to make one request while we're out of earshot of anybody else."

"Of course." She waited, having half turned toward him.

"It's really very simple, Kay. I've been calling you by your first name for close to a couple of weeks by now and you've called me 'Mr. Storm'. That represents a labor-management inequity. I demand the right to be called by my first name as per a previous talk."

If the two of them had been standing in almost any

other place and out of the eye of those frightening lithographs, Kay would have smiled.

"Certainly," she said, and began, "Rol- —"

They were interrupted by a call from the house that seemed like a cross between a shout and a scream.

Kay remembered, in the brief moment of paralysis brought on by shock, that Wink was in his bedroom and Bert Gibson was close by. Only then did she realize that the woman's voice (Jessica's?) was carrying across a considerable distance. Her eyes strayed to Rolf Storm's signature at the bottom of a lithograph and the numbered notation, 5/40, was a vague blur next to an indecipherable name before her eyes.

"That's Jess," Rolf Storm said, running in front of Kay to open the door. He was already outside when Kay, in spite of low heels, managed to reach the garage.

She ran up the hill, noticing that the lights gleamed wickedly in the room where Jessica had interviewed her. The front door had been left ajar for Kay.

The room full of antiques had been disturbed. Artificial flowers, chewed at the tops, lolled on the floor. The Ispahan carpet was dirty. An ashtray had clattered to the carpet. One of the chair pillows looked as if it had been partially ripped. Bert Gibson, embarrassed and even pained, studiously avoided so much as a glance at Jessica.

Rolf's sister was sitting on the couch and pausing only to look around at the damaged pieces in the room. Kay saw that the woman was dry-eyed, but the stiffness of her spine reflected powerful anger.

Rolf asked patiently, and not for the first time since he'd got here, in Kay's opinion, "What happened, Jess?"

"You can see what happened," his sister said with sarcasm. The sari she was wearing, blush-pink over a dark shade of blue, quivered at her every breath. "I came back from the Kinnina Improvement Association

meeting and found *him* here. I actually found him chewing on one of the pillows. If I'd had a gun in my hand I would have killed the beast outright then and there."

"Do you mean Satellite?" Rolf asked. "How did Wink's bulldog get in here?"

"The door had been left open," Jessica told him. "Arlene denies doing it, Bert Gibson denies it, and I'm sure you'll claim you didn't do it either. But the door was open and that beast did get in here. There are items in this room from every period of Storm House's history and a miserable mongrel came in and destroyed so many of them. I don't care *who* that beast is supposed to be protecting. I want him shot."

"I can't say I blame you," Rolf nodded agreeably. "If he got into the print shop and smudged a working stone before Bert could make a cancellation proof and kill the edition, I'd want him shot, too."

"I really do want him shot," Jessica said, knitting her brows determinedly. "I'm not joking about this."

"Nobody says you don't mean it seriously," Rolf conceded. He glanced at Bert Gibson. "You've probably got so many things to do otherwise, Bert, that you shouldn't need to stand around listening to a family quarrel."

Jessica said stiffly, "Nor should anybody else be snooping. I want this room cleared of everyone but you and me."

Bert Gibson left hurriedly.

Rolf made his voice almost a whisper. "Since this business may affect the boy's welfare, we'll let his governess stay with us."

"I demand—"

"You're making a number of demands with only lung-power to back them up, Jess. That simply isn't enough of a threat to get you your own way, I'm afraid."

"That beast has to be shot."

"Jess, you'll repeat the same things and then I will, too. There's no sense to that. I understand that you want to get rid of Satellite. I accept the fact that you dislike the animal. On the plus side, though, let me point out that he helps in our major task of the moment. Satellite is an efficient assistant guardian of the child."

"That dog has always hated me," Jessica said regally. "It came in here to destroy, to get its revenge on me. We'll see if I let a dog win out over my will!"

"I doubt if the dog came in for revenge," Rolf said. "Satellite was probably so impressed with the beauty of the room that he performed his equivalent of fingering some of the magnificent furnishings."

"There is nothing funny about this!"

"A matter of opinion, Jess, but I respect yours and I don't quarrel with it." His patience was wearing thin, however. "As long as the boy needs protection and accepts the animal as a companion, then I should say that the dog is more important to this house than you are."

"I beg your pardon!" Jessica drew her hands over her breasts, as if she had been trapped and was defenseless.

"If anything happens to the child, anything really bad, then you and I will be booted out of Storm House and will have to make do with an apartment somewhere. Isn't that true, Jess? And won't you admit that the dog, as much as you may dislike him, is helping you to hold on to your heritage? And mine, too, of course."

"I won't stand for wanton destruction in the house."

"Keep this room locked, then, when you're not using it. That ought to solve the problem."

"But suppose I have company here and that beast wanders in and starts chewing up the furniture." Jessica closed her eyes; the vision was too much for her. "Obedience school training or not, there doesn't seem to be any way of preventing it."

"We'll work something out," Rolf said soothingly.

"*I'll* work something out, you mean." A hard light burned in Jessica Storm's eyes. "There's no one else who cares enough about the traditions of this house."

"We seem to have solved that particular burning issue," Rolf said jovially, "and we can all go about our own affairs for a while longer."

"I'm staying here to plan the repair work, as a start," Jessica said. "The carpet has to be cleaned and the chairs upholstered, all on account of—"

At Rolf's gesture, Kay left with him. The room was locked from inside with a vicious snap of anger.

Kay waited till she and Rolf were in the poker salon before saying: "Your sister seems set on having the dog shot."

"Jessica will have to think better of it in time." Rolf poured two scotch-and-sodas and brought them over to the center table. "She's not a senseless creature."

"Anybody who would have a living thing shot for doing harm to furniture is at least slightly demented," Kay couldn't help remarking. "Killing an animal for any other reason than immediate urgent necessity is simply a perverted thing to do, and I must say your sister feels strongly enough to do just that."

"She does now, but she won't when she thinks it over," Rolf said confidently. He sat down on one of the Spanish Renaissance chairs and crossed his legs. "As you were saying back at the print shop before we were so rudely interrupted, 'Certainly, Rol-—' You got no further with my first name, and I wish you would."

"Rolf."

"Ah, that sounds fine. It rolls off your tongue as if you'd been saying it all your life."

"Thank you."

Kay couldn't help smiling at him. The man was attractive and personable. If only he hadn't been so free-and-easy in his mental processes, so darned uncaring

about truly important things, he could have been someone for her to take with considerable seriousness.

"As I was going to point out to you back in the print shop," he said easily, "lithography involves no carving, etching or chiselling; and it enables people of modest means to own originals by first-rate artists. Even if you find yourself uncomfortable in the presence of my own particular work, I think you'll have to concede that the form itself . . ."

Ten

IT TURNED out to be a bad mistake to have forgotten about Jessica and her threats.

Jessica was in front of the antique room door early next morning when Kay joined Wink to go over to the summerhouse for the day's lessons. Wink, of course, was accompanied by Satellite. As soon as the chocolate-brown bulldog sniffed tentatively at the closed room door Jessica bent down to lift a riding whip. Her right hand was making a semicircle in the air when Kay gripped the hand by her wrist, forcing it back against the door.

Wink and the bulldog were running to the summerhouse before Kay let Jessica's hand go and swiftly stepped beyond her reach.

Jessica said carefully and distinctly, "That was the last straw. The last!"

She turned away and hurried up the stairs.

Kay joined Wink in the summerhouse. Under the circumstances it took some time before the boy was ready to begin his day's lessons, and it took additional time before he was able to concentrate. Wink was pointing out the route of the Amazon River as seen on a globe when the lunch bell rang from the kitchen.

As Wink and the snuffling bulldog raced to the main building, Kay set down a few notations for herself about the afternoon's work and then walked to the back of Storm House and over to the kitchen, where she preferred to eat lunch. It was a large room with a butcher's block, a refrigerator-freezer unit and, over against the far wall, a table and some chairs. Mrs. Eagan, the cook, was a good-natured buxom woman who'd been on the domestic staff of Storm House for thirty years.

"The trouble with being a cook," she said cheerfully when Arlene had come back for dessert dishes to be served in the dining room, "is that you're always being second-guessed. Either a woman works in a job that requires bringing in money to the firm or she's being second-guessed. What's wrong with the world is that there are too many people who think they know your business better than you do."

"I suppose so," Kay said agreeably, her mouth almost filled with a slice of tomato and some lettuce.

"Everything in the world gets judged by how much money is brought in," Mrs. Eagan said with a sort of mournful relish. "For instance, some years ago Mr. Eagan (rest his soul) got it into his head to visit Ireland. Neither of us had ever been there, but we were always hearing that Ireland was our real home, so out we went for a while. Those people over there weren't like anybody I'd ever met in this country, let me tell you, and not at all like some American Irish folk I know; the Irish in Ireland are thoughtful, kind, friendly and warm. They're lovely people, believe me. And then Eagan and I both realized that the main reason we liked them is that they live in a country that's behind the times in too many ways and that they couldn't possibly hurt us, financially. Truly, Miss, our liking for them did us no credit. They could have been just as decent as they are and hustlers besides, and Eagan and myself would've been totally indifferent to them.

Our only basis of judgment was the fact that the Ireland Irish wouldn't ever interfere, even remotely, with Eagan's income or mine."

"I think you'd have liked them anyway," Kay said with a smile. "It's hard for me to believe that you're such a callous woman as you make yourself sound, Mrs. Eagan."

"You're kind to say that, Miss, but I have to say that it's not a matter of callousness. A person's likes and dislikes depend on how much money is involved and on whether there's any threat to her."

"Storm House is supposed to dislike certain people," Kay remarked. "Does that mean it feels threatened by them?"

"By some persons, of course, according to all the stories," Mrs. Eagan remarked, pausing in mid-bustle to glance out the window. She lowered her voice. "But whenever Storm House has acted up (if you want to call it that) there's been a threat to its existence. The Confederate sympathizer in the family could've had his property confiscated and it might have passed out of his hands. The fellow Hopkins, the rich caretaker, might have bought the place in time had he been able to overcome his miserliness. Or so it's been said. Miss Bootsie Storm and her friends were just about wrecking the old place when—mercy me! That's what I *thought* I saw."

"What's wrong?"

"Miss Jessica just left the house, and she was carrying something like a basket or a big hamper. She's on her way to the garage. If that doesn't beat everything! I'd swear Miss Jessica wouldn't do any heavy work as long as there's a handyman around to do it for her. Ah! She put down the hamper and opened the garage door. Now she's carrying it inside."

"Can't you tell what it is?"

"Well, it looks heavy. My eyesight isn't what it used to be (all this stuff your hear about middle-aged sight,

Miss, is a lot of foolishness; my eyes are worse than they ever were), but it's certainly half Miss Jessica's size. And it seem as heavy as Miss Jessica herself, at least to judge from the way she walks when she lifts the darn thing."

Vaguely disturbed, Kay stood up and walked over to the kitchen window. She could look down at the garage and its opened door gleaming in the sun. As she watched, the black Chevrolet appeared and was driven down the road. Kay had a glimpse of Jessica's face, hard with determination.

"Does Miss Jessica usually leave the house at about this time?"

"No, Miss, I've never seen her do that before." Mrs. Eagan sighed heavily. "Still, what with Himself going up to his room most afternoons like the fellow in that story about Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, why, it's no wonder that Storm House isn't nearly what it used to be."

"I wish I'd seen her before she went into the garage," Kay said, turning from the window to walk back to the table and the unfinished meal. "Well, it's too late now. I was going to ask you, Mrs. Eagan, whether you think that Storm House feels I'm a threat to it. Miss Jessica thought so when she saw me for the first time."

"Oh, no, I'm sure it isn't that way in your case," Mrs. Eagan hurried to assure her. "The house has let you alone, so you must be all right. In fact, your being such a good-natured girl (you remind me of myself in my younger years, as a matter of fact), it may even be that the house is fond of you."

Kay listened gravely to this nonsense. "Well, it's nice to be liked by a house, Mrs. Eagan. It does give a girl quite a feeling of security."

Mrs. Eagan shook her head somberly. "You shouldn't make jokes about the house. There have been too many stories about it, too many known happenings. I realize what you'll tell me, Miss, that I'm Irish and

imaginative. Well, I don't believe in the Little People or ghosts or demons, but I do believe that Storm House can make trouble for the ones it dislikes. Do you know what the house did to that movie actor- — Good Lord!"

The kitchen door burst open and Wink rushed in. His hair was dishevelled, and both eyes were wide open. His lower lip trembled and he blinked furiously as if he was on the verge of tears.

"Not here, either?" the boy asked, looking from left to right along the checkered linoleum floor. "He's gone, he's gone."

"Who is?" Kay asked patiently. "Calm yourself, Wink, and tell me what's wrong."

"Satellite," the boy said, choking back a sob. "My dog is gone."

Kay, finishing her coffee, suddenly put the cup down. She had a vivid recollection of Mrs. Eagan's surprise at seeing Jessica Storm carrying a heavy hamper only a few moments back.

She kept her voice even. "Tell me what happened, Wink. Where did you see Satellite last?"

"We came in to lunch, and Aunt Jessica said she didn't want to eat in the same room with him. She's still mad on account of Satellite chewing up the antique room, you know. So Arlene put Satellite's bowl in another room. Then Aunt Jessica said she had to go someplace and she left the table." Wink suddenly gaped. "Did Aunt Jessica steal him away?"

Kay almost nodded. Probably some tranquilizer had been put into the dog food and Jessica had been able to get Satellite into a hamper and bring that to the garage. Jessica must indeed have been determined to get rid of the dog.

Kay tried not to sound as if the answer was a foregone conclusion.

"Tell me where else you've looked for Satellite beside the kitchen."

"All over."

"What about the antique room? Have you looked there?"

"I can't. It's locked all the time except when Aunt Jessica is inside, and I think she keeps it locked then, too. But I banged on the door and Satellite didn't bark at me, even when I called him. If he was in there, he'd bark when I called him."

"I suppose he decided to take a walk on his own and he's out somewhere."

"Do you think so, Miss Campbell?" Wink's fixed look at her showed Kay how much the boy wanted to believe the most normal and cheerful explanation for the dog's disappearance.

"I'm almost certain," Kay said easily. "Have you talked to Bert Gibson about it?"

"No, he's busy with Uncle Rolf in the music room. I looked in and made sure Satellite wasn't there, either."

"Let me talk to both of them about it," Kay started soothingly, having decided on a step to take. When the boy rushed to the door she said with gentleness, "Maybe you should stay here for awhile, or go out to the summerhouse and wait for me."

"But Satellite is—"

"It won't take long before he's back, and you've still got work to do this afternoon, young man."

"All right, I'll go out there."

"Better yet, wait for me in this room and I'll tell Bert and your uncle the *whole* story," Kay said, choosing her words precisely. "When I come back, I'll let you know that much sooner exactly what they say about it."

"I guess I'll wait," Wink agreed slowly. "I guess Satellite hasn't gone too far."

Mrs. Eagan said, "And tell that Bert Gibson that there's a good meal waiting for him if he's at all interested in getting something into his stomach."

Kay rushed out of the kitchen. The music room was next to the antique room. She knocked lightly on the

door, then opened it. The room was a big one with a huge radio at one end, a stereo with two loudspeakers set far apart at the other. At a line with the mid-point between speakers a row of comfortable chairs had been set down. Bert Gibson stood looking at the floor and listening to a song being played on the stereo. It was a light operetta piece, and full, self-assured voices filled the room.

"Sounds all right to me, Mr. Storm," Bert Gibson said, offering his opinion diffidently as usual. "The trouble you heard might'a been caused by the record itself."

Kay said, "I need your attention, both of you. Jessica has kidnapped the dog and we have to get him back if it's at all possible."

Rolf Storm had been holding a record jacket in one hand, an original cast recording of *Candide*. At his glance toward Bert, the handyman swiftly closed the stereo and eased the record into the jacket as soon as Rolf Storm handed it across. With his usual shrinking from emotion, Bert Gibson turned his back to Kay while she told Rolf what had happened.

Rolf nodded slowly when she was finished.

"I'll make a phone call," he said. "You two can come with me if you like."

Kay followed him to the door, but looked around at Bert Gibson as she reached the threshold. She called back:

"Mrs. Eagan says she has a meal waiting for you, Bert."

"I'll be there in a little while," he said, but didn't take a step out of the music room. Perhaps he was afraid he might overhear some burst of feeling.

Rolf led her to an alcove, where a black phone had been placed on a small table. He leaned on the bamboo-back chair as he sat down, crossed his legs, and dialed calmly.

"Mr. Garrison, please. . . . Garry? Rolf Storm here.

Something I want to ask you. Did you get a phone call from my sister today and did she tell you she'd be coming in to your place?"

"Yes, she did," Mr. Garrison said in a clear, carrying voice against a background of dogs barking with various shades of indignation. "She called me a little earlier and told me she was bringing Satellite in to be destroyed."

"Yes, that's what I thought she'd do." The confirmation of his guess made Rolf blink several times as if his eyes hurt him. "Did she happen to tell you why she wants him put to sleep?"

"Not in so many words, Rolf. Your sister doesn't give out any more information to her social and economic inferiors than she has to. But I got the strong impression that he's been very sick."

"I see." Rolf cleared his throat.

Mr. Garrison came to the rescue. "I suppose there's been some disagreement between you two about the dog —this sort of problem comes up pretty often, believe me—and you want Satellite back. It must be a very strong disagreement, Rolf, if you of all people are willing to go against somebody else's wishes."

Rolf asked, "What's the best way to manage it so as not to get you in any trouble with my sister or her friends?"

"That depends." Mr. Garrison hummed thoughtfully. "Whenever I come out to see you and play some chess, I get the impression that Satellite doesn't care for your sister. How is she able to get him here, do you suppose?"

"I suppose he's been drugged."

"Oh, then that simplifies the whole problem," Mr. Garrison said cheerfully. "I'll tell your sister that I have to examine the dog before I can destroy him. I'll tell her it's a state law."

"Suppose she insists on waiting around till Satellite is put to sleep."

"I'll tell her that the tests will take all day. Unlike a certain party I play chess with, it doesn't bother me if somebody is set on one course and I'm set on another one altogether."

"Oh, I might surprise you sometimes," Rolf said, but his voice was mild. "Keep Satellite there till the evening, Garry, then I'll tell her you phoned and spoke to me, and I'll come out to your place to pick him up."

"It'll be a lot better for the dog if I keep him here overnight," Mr. Garrison pointed out. "Assuming that the dog has been drugged, it can't do the slightest harm to check him out thoroughly against any untoward reaction."

"I was hoping to get him back today," Rolf admitted, "but I guess you know your business. So long, Garry."

He put the phone down and rested his chin on his palms. Using both forefingers he rubbed the sides of his neck.

"Wink is going to spend tonight without the dog's protection and that's all there is to it."

Kay tried to sound comforting. "One night can't make such a big difference."

"Let's hope not."

She said, "I have to tell Wink that Satellite has been found. I won't say anything about your sister wanting him destroyed."

"Fine. Just tell him Satellite is at the vet's. That'll keep him from getting sore at Jessica. The less irritation there is in this house the better it is for me to get my own work done."

Kay saw a brief flash of Rolf's attractive smile as she turned and hurried back to the kitchen. The day had turned unexpectedly threatening, as sometimes happened during early spring in upstate New York. Puffy clouds drifted by overhead in a patch of sky seen through the kitchen window.

There was no one at the table. Mrs. Eagan was

standing in front of the refrigerator and re-tying the capacious kitchen apron which she wore.

"Where's Wink?" Kay asked, not feeling more than a flick of concern.

"I couldn't hold him," Mrs. Eagan said regretfully. "Soon as he realized that his dog might be outside he decided on going out to look for him."

"Do you mean that he's somewhere on the grounds looking for the dog?" She felt concern strongly now, like sandpaper rubbed against bare skin.

"How should I know if he's on the grounds or off them?" Mrs. Eagan asked, having finished re-tying the spotless apron. "I was going to look for you, Miss, and let you know what's happened even though I doubt if there's anything you can do about it except wait till Wink comes back."

"*I* can do something about it," Kay said determinedly, and left the kitchen without another word.

Eleven

RAINDROPS WERE coming down softly when Kay reached the fresh air. She was dressed for rain, with rubber boots, a raincoat and hat to match, and an umbrella as red as her hair.

She had told Rolf that the boy was out hunting for Satellite. Rolf promptly decided to look for Wink by going in one car toward Kinnina while Bert Gibson would take another car in the opposite direction. Typically, he offered Bert the choice of cars, and Bert took the rugged dependable station wagon.

Kay had decided from the beginning that she'd go on foot. The boy couldn't be too far away, and he'd certainly need to be protected from the rain.

She moved uncertainly from the hilly land to table

land, passing the summerhouse. With every five or six steps that she took, she would call out the boy's name and add that Satellite was safe. There was no response. Rain was coming down far more heavily, but her voice could still carry and she was able to see what lay ahead of her.

Kay hadn't walked this far from the house in two weeks of being employed there. In order to see the six-sided summerhouse she'd have needed to turn back and narrow her eyes, but she chose not to spend time doing that. She looked only to her right and left as well as in front of her, and she called the boy's name regularly, adding the message about Satellite's safety.

Kay knew that she'd be in a dangerous position if lightning were to come down, too. But not even that knowledge kept her from moving forward.

Her voice didn't carry too well and she was reduced to calling the boy's name after every three or four steps without saying anything else; the situation had changed and become much worse. Under her feet the earth turned squashy, and there wasn't any way of guessing how well the next blob of earth that she stepped on was likely to take the burden.

Wink must have been completely without protection, and it'd be impossible for him to move. Most likely he was under a tree and waiting with his usual hopefulness for the rain to subside. No doubt it'd never occur to him that the rain might keep on for hours, and he didn't have a chance of making progress during that time.

It was the tree with a bough drooping almost to the ground which clouded her vision more than the rain itself, and was responsible in that way for the accident. There was some chance that the boy might be waiting between bough and trunk, where he could have made the choice not to hear Kay's call. Any possibility was worth investigating in this particular situation. Kay approached gingerly, circling the drooping bough—and promptly lost her balance.

Too late she realized that just beyond the bough was a hill. She was half-skipping, half-sliding in her frantic quest to put one foot in front of the other and resume control over her steps. For a flash of time she wished that she had stayed in Garden and been married to Charles Bundy despite his domineering mother and his inclination to talk to everybody else as if they were grade school students.

She was very nearly running down the hill, but when she threw out both her hands and let the raindrops briefly cover her, she found that she was able to regain some balance. Partly because she was so preoccupied with keeping herself upright she didn't see the stone in her path.

It was a small stone, no bigger than her wallet; but when Kay struck it with a foot she was sent sprawling. She reached the bottom of the hill, which mercifully hadn't been too far from where she tripped. She was face downward against damp earth. Her umbrella was inside out.

As she was rising she saw the four white sidewall tires deeply indented against a side of the road.

There was a car, and it wasn't a familiar one to her. It was long, low and black, with windshield wipers going frantically. No one sat behind the wheel. Hope rose in Kay as she looked around.

Under a tree and gesticulating with one arm, stood a man covering the top of his head with an umbrella. His body was thick, and rolls of fat bulged from the back of his neck. It was impossible to hear a word of his talk, just as the rain had kept him from hearing Kay's fall.

She was able to get up slowly, and tested her ankles to make sure they hadn't been wrenched. Walking was difficult. She restored the umbrella as best she could and started to make her way toward the tree.

She had gone less than half the distance when she cleared her throat and started:

"Excuse me, but have you seen—?"

The stranger whirled around, his eyes widening. His movements had taken him slightly off-balance in the muddy earth, so that it was possible to see who he was talking to. It was Wink. The child looked unhappy and wet. His light blond hair clung to the sides of his head as if for dear life.

"Wink!" Kay said.

The boy smiled thinly at hearing himself called by the family name when he was with a stranger.

The chunky man asked suspiciously, "You know this here kid?"

"I'm his governess," Kay said carefully.

"I've been tryin' to talk him into letting me give him a ride back home," the stranger said in a grating voice. "He gives me some song-and-dance about a lost mutt."

Kay half-nodded to him and told the anxious Wink, "Satellite is all right, I've just heard. Aunt Jessica saw that he was sick and without wanting to get you worried about it, she herself took him to Mr. Garrison, the vet. Mr. Garrison will see that he gets home by tomorrow."

It was the stranger who asked thoughtfully: "Tomorrow?"

But Kay only thought that he was politely assimilating a story that couldn't have meant less to him. She herself would have done that, though not so obviously, and then spoken some added comforting words to the distraught child. She took it for granted that the unprepossessing stranger was of the same turn of mind.

"Well, good for you," he said flatly. "Damn dogs are always causing trouble."

Kay waited expectantly for the man to offer her a lift along with the child. What the man did was to turn away from her, raise the umbrella higher so as to give him added protection, and trudge over to his car. He slammed the door back of him. With a brusque and irritated motion he began warming the motor.

There was no reason for warning the child about never taking a car ride with some stranger; Wink hadn't taken one, either because he disliked the chunky man as much as Kay did or he wanted to stay and try locating Satellite.

She managed to refrain from putting an arm around him and hugging him; he simply wouldn't be able to understand anyone thinking that something bad might just possibly have happened to him.

"Gee, I'm glad Aunt Jessica took Satellite to the vet," Wink said, accepting Kay's story completely. "I always figured she didn't like Satellite much."

"Your Aunt Jessica likes you," Kay said a trifle mechanically, "and doesn't want you to be unhappy."

"I guess so. It looks like I've been all wrong about Aunt Jessica."

"You have to remember," Kay told him above the persistent roar of the warming car motor on the road, "that everybody in your family loves you."

"I guess that's right," Wink agreed. "You know what I'm going to do when this rain lets up and we go home? I'm going to walk over to Aunt Jessica and I'll say I'm sorry because I was wrong about her. That's what I'll do. The first thing when I get back home I'll tell her I'm sorry."

"You don't have to go that far," said Kay.

"Of course my sister behaved pretty outrageously," Rolf Storm was saying, "but she's had a rough life and you have to make some allowances for her."

It was seven o'clock. He was watching Kay take a drink before dinner. He had said that he'd be going up to his room after dinner to do a little extra sketching and he had no intention of taking any drinks beforehand. But he didn't refrain from bringing Kay into the poker salon and giving her a scotch and sodaa.

"I'm sure your sister has been frustrated in love or ambition," Kay said, the beaded chiffon dress catching

light as she lowered her head after a sip. "I don't think it excuses her, though, for behaving the way she did about the dog."

"*I'm* willing to make allowances, Kay, and I just had the discussion with her."

It had been more of a nerve-storm on Jessica's part than a discussion. Rolf told Kay afterwards that he had eased Jessica into her own bedroom and sat by while she vented her anger on him. Not till he was sure that Jessica had calmed down and wouldn't cause any more trouble with Satellite did Rolf leave her. He told the story as if all that had been involved was a mild difference of opinion.

"There's something more important right now," Kay said, leaning forward tensely. "I mean the strange man who I told you was talking to Wink. I'm absolutely convinced that he was—well, up to no good."

"Trying to kidnap the boy, you mean? Something like that?"

"I don't know exactly what, but he wasn't out to do Wink any favors."

"That in itself hardly makes him out to be a suspicious character."

"His behavior changed as soon as I came along. He had been trying to persuade Wink to get into his car, but when I showed up he simply went to the car and began warming up the motor. It must have taken him till doomsday, but he finally got out of there."

"You don't make him sound like a kindly old uncle," Rolf agreed mildly. "Maybe he didn't want to have two people staining his upholstery. There are men who take almost as many pains over a car as Jessica does when it comes to those antiques of hers."

Kay bristled. "Really, I think you could find excuses for anybody in the world!"

"Maybe there are excuses, if you know enough about the circumstances," Rolf drawled. "This fellow sounds like somebody I ought to mention to the State Troop-

ers at Kinnina, but I don't have any proof to get me worried."

"I can suggest something that might make you wonder about him," Kay said. "Do you remember saying to me that there was one person who would profit under Wink's mother's will if (God forbid!) anything happened to Wink? Why couldn't this man be the one who profits?"

"It isn't a man who profits, in the first place," Rolf said, letting her down gently. "It's a little elderly woman who never hurt anybody in her life, and you'll never convince me that she'd want any harm coming to Wink."

"Have you investigated her by the way?"

"I've hired some private detectives to do a thorough job, Kay. They're satisfied about the woman's decency; I'm satisfied, too, and that should settle it. As far as this joker in the car that you tell me about is concerned, show me some proof that he's causing the trouble and I'll do everything I can in order to put him behind bars."

The dinner bell rang gently. On her way to the dining room, Kay barked a shin against a door that she'd have sworn was closed. As she rubbed the wound she remembered the buxom cook, Mrs. Eagan, telling Kay that Storm House apparently liked Wink's new governess. At that moment, Kay could have done without such solid evidence of the house's regard for her.

Dinner that evening wasn't much like the other meals Kay had eaten here. Wink was even more cheerful than usual on account of Satallite's impending return on the next day. Kay had to promise that if Wink finished his meal without bolting the food she'd let him phone the vet's and "talk" to Satellite. Jessica, her eyes briefly squeezed shut in a paroxysm of disgust, made a point of talking to her brother about politics as soon as the boy was reasonably quiet.

". . . and there is far too much so-called social wel-

fare legislation in this country," she was saying as she took vegetables from the dish which Arlene held respectfully on a tray. "People should be taught to help themselves. A whole generation is going to grow up without any concept of self-reliance."

Kay, glancing from mistress to maid and back again, couldn't help laughing.

Rolf cut in smoothly with an innocuous remark, admitting that there was some truth in what his sister said but wondering whether many people were as able to help themselves as he and Jessica.

All in all, Kay felt grateful when the meal was over and done with. An hour later, seeing to it that the boy had made his phone call and then gone to sleep after putting on a cowboy hat to watch a television Western, Kay made her way downstairs.

Mrs. Eagan had left the kitchen some time ago, but Bert Gibson was there. He had spread some of yesterday's local paper over the kitchen table and was calmly taking a clock to pieces. As soon as he saw Kay he stood up politely. Kay, who couldn't remember when a man had done that for her, awkwardly gestured him to sit down.

"Do you fix all the clocks at Storm House?" she asked politely.

"No, I'm just doing this one to exercise my hands," Bert Gibson said, glancing at his watch. "Besides, it'll keep me busy for another ten minutes when I have to go up to Mr. Storm's room. He's sketching tonight, you know."

"And are you going to print lithographs of his new sketches tonight?"

"No, Mr. Rolf just wants to find out how the night time will affect his work, along with all the other—well, it's one of the experiments he's making nowadays."

"I've wanted to hear about those experiments for a long time, Bert," she said, deciding to get as much information out of him as she could.

It was unfair to put pressure on somebody as socially weak as Bert Gibson. His face flushed, and a metal spring that had been part of the clock in front of him suddenly dropped out of his nerveless hands.

"I haven't got any time to talk," he said hurriedly. "I have to go upstairs."

"You have ten minutes, Bert. There are all sorts of things you can tell me in that much time."

"No, I can't. I—I have to go someplace else."

"Where? You aren't going to do any printing tonight. You just told me that much, yourself."

He knitted his brows, trying to remember some different possible destination he knew well. "The—the garage, Miss Campbell. I have to go out there and fix one of the cars."

"In less than ten minutes you'll fix a car?"

"Well, I—I'll be going into town a little later on, you see, and I don't want to wait too long for the motor to catch, so I have to warm it up in advance."

Kay was distracted. Carefully she asked, "Do you mean that if it takes a motor a long time to warm up, then the car has been still for quite a while?"

"Yes, Miss Campbell. It's different in winter, but—"

He sounded relieved at having taken her mind off the subject of Rolf Storm's experiments, and would probably have given her the sort of exhaustive lecture on car-care which Kay sometimes heard from a man too shy to talk about more personal subjects.

"I told you and Mr. Storm about the man who was talking to Wink early this afternoon," she said. "When that man went to warm up his motor it took as much as fifteen minutes, maybe even longer."

"Either the car had been in place for a very long time, which would be pretty suspicious by itself if you ask me," Bert said thoughtfully, "or he didn't want to leave the place where you and Wink were standing."

"And no matter which explanation is true, Bert, wouldn't you call it suspicious?"

Being asked straight-out for an opinion made Bert wary, but he finally nodded.

Kay said, "Mr. Storm simply didn't see it that way before, and I didn't know enough about cars to insist that I was right."

"I guess you're right," Bert agreed, "when you put it like that."

"Mr. Storm has to have it put like that to him as soon as possible," Kay said firmly. "I want you to go up with me and make sure I get in to see him right now."

Bert had been sitting on the chair's edge, but now he pulled himself back and drew up a hand to cover his face.

"I can't do that."

"You have to," Kay said. "The boy might be in immediate danger, and Mr. Storm has to know about it as soon as possible."

"Look here, when I leave Mr. Storm I'll go to the boy's room and I'll spend the whole night on guard in front of it. I promise I will, but please don't ask me—"

"Either give me Mr. Storm's key and go to Wink's room right now or unlock Mr. Storm's door for me and then go to Wink's room," Kay said. "There's something like proof now that the man is after Wink, and he may try to get at him tonight when the dog isn't close by."

Bert Gibson's mind was made up. "I'll go to Billy's room right away and stand guard in front of it."

"Let me have Mr. Storm's key," she said.

He started responding automatically to Kay's tone and put up a hand to a pocket of his sports shirt. Slowly he withdrew the hand. Kay simply reached toward him and plucked the key out of his pocket, then moved beyond his reach. Bert could have caught up to her and forced the key out of her hand, but he obviously wasn't able to nerve himself for that.

"Miss Campbell, you shouldn't go up there," he said as Kay turned on her heels. "Believe me, if you step into Rolf Storm's room now you'll be sorry for having done it."

Kay didn't halt her progress. She was going to confront Rolf once and for all with what she now knew about that chunky man in the road, and no one would stop her.

Twelve

KAY WALKED along the small and narrow second floor hallway till she reached the third brown-painted door on her left. Although she knocked softly there wasn't any response from the other side.

"I'm coming in," she said, and unlocked the door.

As soon as she opened it, she wished for a rare and selfish moment that she had stayed far from Storm House and all the people in it.

She was in a wide anteroom that led to a smaller bedroom. There was a minimum of furniture and most of that was modern. The walls were bare, which was surprising to her, and Kay didn't doubt for a moment that not a speck of dust would be found here or in the bedroom.

Rolf Storm, in blue jeans and a checkered shirt, sat on the floor with his back to a wall. A sketch pad, opened, was in his lap. He held a grease pencil gently in one hand, but raised it when he saw Kay. The anger that she would have expected simply didn't show in his face.

"Join me?" Through the vacant smile on his lips, the man's voice was thickened and furry. "There's enough sugar for you."

He glanced down on his far side. Following his eyes, Kay saw a paper bag with wrapped sugar cubes and a bottle with a dropper held to it by a rubber band.

"But what is this?" Kay asked, bewildered and still feeling pinpricks of curiosity in spite of the brief terror. "What are you doing?"

"Making sketches of paradise." His smile grew even more vacant. "Paradise as seen by me and LSD-25, also known as (let's see if I can get it out) D-lysergic acid diethylamide."

"And this is your experiment? You want to see what you'll draw when you've got LSD in you? That's what you've been doing all this time?"

"I'm free." A giggle welled up from his throat. "I'm free."

He was talking to something else in the room with him, but something that Kay knew she would never see.

She might have guessed that a man as freewheeling as Rolf Storm would be tempted to try a hallucination-producing drug at least once in his lifetime; but not that he would embark on a program of periodic use to see how it would change his artistic perceptions. But she had long wanted to know what he was up to in such secrecy, and it was only unfortunate that she should find it out at a time when it might be important for him to be in good physical condition.

"See," Rolf Storm said with affable carelessness. "See."

Kay realized that she felt some curiosity to know what sort of a sketch he could have produced under the influence of the drug. It pulled her toward him and to the right, where she could look past his dark hair and firm chin and down at the sketch book.

For the life of her Kay didn't know whether to laugh or wince. He was trying to reproduce what he called paradise, but he had shown a number of disjointed wavy lines and some others that were intended to be

straight, along with various dots and semi-circles and wavy-lined triangles. That was all.

She almost found herself believing as she stared down at the childish sketch that there really was some curse connected with Storm House, and that the house harmed such people as it disliked; and that the house hated Rolf Storm every bit as much as Mrs. Eagan claimed that the house liked Kay herself. And it hurt even more bitterly for Kay to realize that her feelings toward Rolf Storm had been maturing and deepening in these last two weeks. She'd been starting to consider Rolf Storm as a man of strong qualities, a man who could give balance to another life with which he might be closely involved.

The feeling that rose in Kay now was such a shocking one because she had the vivid impression of being close to madness, and that another few minutes would push her far over the brink to a black emptiness . . .

Noise erupted along the hall, bringing Kay back to sanity and a fresh recollection of what had to be done in order to help Wink.

Without pausing to see how Rolf Storm had reacted to the sounds or whether he had heard them at all through the drug-made stupor, she turned and ran out of the room. Dimness faced her in the hallway which was lighted only by a thin yellow haze from shaded lamps placed at long intervals. She ran to the end of the L-shaped hallway and turned.

There had been no stillness from the other end during her rush to the scene itself. She could hear hard footsteps and lighter ones, a shout from Bert Gibson and then a baritone scream, highly-pitched and rising in its tones. There was a clatter and then three thudding noises. There was a bubbling gasp. Stillness became complete in the house, it seemed, except for Kay turning the corner.

She didn't make for the rear stairs, but paused in front of Wink's bedroom and carefully opened the door. Darkness within was punctuated by an occasional sound of sleep-induced serenity. Through the last few minutes of thunderous noise, Wink Storm had slept the long full sleep of youth. Kay blew a kiss at him as she closed the door softly.

She encountered Jessica Storm's icily reserved stare as soon as she turned away from Wink's door. A door was open behind her and across the corridor, throwing pale light past the threshold and onto the back of Jessica's garish but expensive bathrobe.

"What hap- —?" she started.

Kay raised a finger to her lips.

"I will not be told what to do by the likes of an employee," Jessica began.

Unmistakably, Wink stirred and muttered. Other sounds had left him undisturbed, but that of Jessica raising her voice was enough to make him toss and turn in the depths of sleep.

There was no time to reflect on the perverseness of childhood responses. From the rear stairs, Bert Gibson was walking toward the two women. In the dimness his face looked more sunburnt than ever before. His lips were turned down bitterly at the corners.

Kay gestured him to be as silent as he could manage. Bert promptly walked on tiptoes.

"I have to make a call, Miss," he said in answer to Jessica's frozen glare. "The police have to be told what happened."

"No!" Jessica said firmly, but her voice was lower. "I'll not have police at my home at ten o'clock in the night. Everybody who knows us will be convinced that there's been a—a raid or something horrid like that."

Bert Gibson was embarrassed. Kay asked:

"Why do you want to call the police?"

"It's a law, Miss. The law says that when something happens and results in—"

"Nonsense!" Jessica snapped. "I assume that the heavy man we heard about earlier during the day is the one who came here and tried to do some harm to the child."

"Yes, Miss Jessica."

"And I'm sure you frightened him."

"Yes, Miss."

"Well, then, he's gone and probably in Sullivan County by now. There'll be no need to disturb the state troopers till morning, Gibson, rather than phoning them near midnight."

Bert didn't dare contradict Jessica Storm, but he shook his head twice more till he saw that she was glaring at him.

Kay cut in before Jessica could make one of her scalding remarks. "Isn't the man gone?"

"No, Miss."

"Do you mean he fell down the stairs and hurt himself?"

"He's dead, Miss," Bert said awkwardly. "He's laying dead at the bottom of the staircase."

Jessica, not at all distracted or silenced by the presence of death, briskly pronounced, "You did it all in self-defense, and the state troopers will be told so in the morning."

"I didn't do that to him, Miss Jessica. You might say that he killed himself."

"Explain what you mean."

"Yes, Miss Jessica. When I went on guard in front of the boy's room I heard sounds from the staircase. I hid myself back of the panel over here in front of Billy's room; there's just enough space for that. After awhile I saw this man coming down the hall. He was a big bruiser, very heavy. I could see he was on his way to Billy's room; the boy must have mentioned where he slept when he was talking to him during the day. Kids will tell their most intimate secrets, sometimes,

thinking that nothing else is more interesting to some grown-up stranger."

Kay said, "I suppose you ran towards him."

"I gripped him around the waist, Miss, trying to get him helpless. He wouldn't let that happen, but punched me so hard I had to double up and then he simply slipped away. But he couldn't go in any direction except backwards; doubled-up or not, I'd never have let him pass me."

Jessica said, "He ran to the stairs, I presume, and fell down them."

"It didn't happen like that, I'm afraid, Miss Jessica. He was going toward the stairs till he whirled around and wanted to charge into me, then suddenly pulled out his hands and made circling motions with them; he had lost his balance. He fell and hit his head hard on the fourth or fifth step. When he got to the bottom of the staircase he was obviously dead. Like I told you a little while ago he killed himself in a way."

"Storm House killed him," Jessica said authoritatively. "It hated him as a stranger; and because of what he had come here to do the house simply killed that miserable little worm."

Kay asked, "What *did* happen to him, Bert? Why do you say he had killed himself?"

"He had put a string across the top step of the stairway," Bert Gibson told her. "It was a piece of dark string, and it wouldn't be seen at night. I suppose that he was going to grab up Billy and—well, force him to the stairs. As it happens, he himself tripped on the string."

Kay couldn't help looking back of her at the closed door of Wink's room and reassuring herself that the child was well. This last try at framing accidental death for Wink had resulted in the death of the chunky man who had made the attempt and in no consequences whatever for the child. Silently, Kay thanked God.

"It's over," Jessica decided. "The man who was

trying to kill Wink is dead now, thanks to Storm House—and it doesn't matter what you say about pieces of string; it was the house that did it. And now there's only the problem of keeping the whole world from knowing what happened. There has to be a solution for that."

Bert Gibson looked puzzled.

"People will always think that there was more to it than meets the eye and wonder if anything else was really behind that revolting man trying to harm Wink. People may even feel that the worm was put up to it by somebody in the family. You never can know in advance what sort of crazy stories people will believe about acquaintances, let alone about friends."

"The police will put out some kind of story that will sound like it explains everything, Miss Jessica."

"But there'll always be lingering questions."

Jessica was rigid and grim. "Make the phone call, Bert. I'll stand by the top of the stairway and keep anybody from getting close to the worm."

Kay wouldn't have guessed that Jessica Storm was likely to trouble for anybody in the world, but she supposed that in a crisis Jessica became conscious of the needs of other persons. In a crisis, then, perhaps Jessica became more like Kay herself.

Perhaps.

But Kay was to realize soon enough that she ought to have known better than to ascribe any normal human feeling to Jessica Storm.

Kay had expected to hear police sirens and to see men in blue uniform moving up and down Storm House like so many ants as they examined the place from stem to stern. What actually happened wasn't at all like that, and was disturbing to her primarily because of the aftermath.

Bert Gibson had joined Rolf while waiting for the police. Kay stood in front of the child's room; there

wasn't any other place where she wanted to be at this time. Twenty minutes passed slowly before the front doorbell rang. Kay heard Jessica walk down the stairs with great precision to answer it. There was some conversation and the door was closed and locked. Several sets of footsteps could be heard in the downstairs hall. Other steps proceeded to the bottom of the rear stairs. Kay made certain that Wink was still asleep and then took the front staircase to the ground floor.

Jessica was in one of the so-called informal rooms, a sparsely furnished airy trio of rooms with comfortable seats, widely scattered mobiles and dozens of cavernous ash trays. She was talking to a State police officer, a tall and handsome man with hair almost as red as Kay's. He was probably in the forties, and taller than even Rolf Storm himself.

"I've been telling this man about the attempted burglary," Jessica said, speaking directly and with some politeness to Kay for the first time.

The state police officer said, "I'm Lieutenant Andrew Crisp, Miss."

"This is only the governess," Jessica said with almost her usual disdain. "The man who chased that burglar will be down in a little while, I'm sure."

Kay asked quietly, "Did you say it was a burglar who came in here?"

Lieutenant Crisp answered that rather than Jessica. "The man carried burglar tools in his pocket and we have no proof he came for any reason other than to burglarize."

Kay sat down. Spacious as the room was, she felt herself hemmed in. For she realized now exactly why Jessica had volunteered to stand at the head of the stairs while everybody waited for the arrival of the state police. It was obvious what the fear of scandal had led Jessica Storm to do.

Jessica had removed all evidence of string having been tied above the top step of the stairway in order to trip up

Wink. She was certainly going to do her best to make sure that the entry would officially be thought to have been made by a burglar and not by some man bent on killing the Storm child.

But even while she listened to Jessica Storm willfully telling the lieutenant how to do his job, Kay wondered if the dead man had been the principal in the murder attempt. Hadn't the attempt actually been directed by a distant relative of the child's dead mother? Wasn't the real criminal an older woman who had never committed any crime but who stood to inherit the child's money?

Kay set her jaw firmly. If what she was thinking happened to be the truth, then there would certainly be other attempts against the child.

Thirteen

HAD KAY'S notion of police procedure been correct, Lieutenant Crisp would have talked to Bert Gibson in another room and carefully found out what had happened. But Jessica blandly overruled the lieutenant's politely veiled request to talk with the handyman out of her presence and dropped a few hints about what she wanted Bert to say. Bert, of course, said exactly that.

Kay decided against putting Bert's job in peril, and he'd certainly have lost it if she had brought any pressure on him to tell the truth. She wandered restlessly out to the hall, getting there in time to see a couple of men with a blanketed stretcher between them. The men walked on tiptoes and spoke to each other in hushed voices, so as not to disturb the sleeping child upstairs. It occurred to Kay that a considerable amount of nonsense had been written about cruelly insensitive men doing police work.

She finally went upstairs, and satisfied herself again

that Wink was still asleep. With that much made certain, Kay decided to get some sleep for herself. Her room, across the hall from Rolf's, was small and snug but comfortable. She had already shifted most of the furniture around to suit her own taste and was trying to decide whether she ought to ask for different drapes that fit more closely into her scheme for what the bedroom ought to be. When she came into her room after the night's turmoil, Kay decided that she couldn't live with the milk-and-water drapes which Jessica had probably decided would be suitable for Wink's governess.

Kay made a point of wiping the venetian blinds front and back before she could compose herself for sleep. She allowed herself to wonder what Rolf Storm would say about the recent happenings as soon as he was in better control of his faculties. Just before she lost consciousness for the night, Kay imagined Rolf Storm telling her warmly that she'd been magnificent with the child during the difficult weeks, that she had been really superb.

Rolf had gone into town next morning by the time Kay appeared downstairs for breakfast. It was Saturday, and she could spend the day as she preferred. Wink was in an informal room with one of his more expensive toys; it permitted him to indulge in slot-car racing at home. Kay could hear the electric hum as an expensive plastic model Italian car spun along a figure-eight track at fifteen miles per hour, stopping when Wink turned off the power. As the power was turned off during so much of the time, Kay took it for granted that Wink was conducting an investigation of the inner workings of the car if not of the track itself.

She knew that the child wouldn't want to spend time in the company of his governess, and soon discovered that Rolf was to be gone for most of the day. Bert Gibson drove her to the bus in Kinnina at her request.

She went back to her place at Garden, wondering whether or not the child was well and warning herself not to put through any calls. Over-solicitude from an employee was sure to make easygoing Rolf Storm pretty uncomfortable.

She arrived back at Storm House on Sunday evening, and found Rolf in the center of one of the informal rooms. He was practicing a golf swing with a niblick in his hands.

"I haven't seen you since that man tried to kill Wink," Rolf said, adjusting his grip on the club. "Bert tells me you had a pretty awful time."

"I suppose you know what really happened and what your sister did."

"Yes." Rolf swung the club again, and muttered to himself. "You can't blame Jessica for wanting to cover up a prospective scandal."

"Withholding information from the police is a criminal offense."

"Jessica is absolutely convinced she's above the law. Comfortable living does that to people, I'm afraid."

"You sound as if you agree with her."

"No, you're completely wrong about that. All I would say is that Jessica's attitude is human and understandable. I'd withhold judgment on whether it's wrong or right. Men and women sitting in judgment on others have done more harm in this world than all the wars in history."

"We're in complete disagreement there, too, I'm afraid."

"Differences of opinion make slot-car races, as Wink would probably point out to you, with diagrams if possible."

Kay nodded as if a serious point had been made, and one that she accepted. She couldn't help feeling sad. In her mint-green dress with the handbag to match, she had expected to get at least one approving look from Rolf Storm. Apparently he was too busy with golfing

practice to consider Kay's appearance. She sat down on what looked like a rickety mound of sofa pillows, but was actually anchored securely to the floor.

"Of course Wink's interest in slot cars is partly to figure out how the electrical impulses work," Rolf said idly as he took another cut at the imaginary ball. "He keeps trying to tell me about it and I haven't got the strength of character to keep putting him off. Would you have imagined that eight-year-old kids would ever be as bright as Wink? And it's not so unusual nowadays either, from what I hear. When I was younger, kids of Wink's age were a bunch of goof-offs with nothing on their minds except playing marbles and collecting pictures of baseball players on cards that were part of bubble-gum packages."

Softly he added, "What's on your mind, Kay? I can see that you're upset."

She said quickly, "I wanted to know if we can all guard Wink better before the next accident. He survived this one by a combination of lucky breaks, you know."

"I do know, yes." He finally stopped the practicing, and looked toward Kay with a puzzled frown. "What do you mean, 'the next accident'?"

"Well, it stands to reason that whoever was behind this accident attempt and all the others is going to try again."

"The man behind the accident attempts against Wink was killed in this house the other night."

"I'm referring to the person who really wants Wink dead," Kay said impatiently. "The person who stands to profit if anything so dreadful happens to Wink."

"I can tell you some facts I'm sure you don't know," Rolf said pleasantly, sitting down beside her. "The state police lieutenant has been giving us information as quick as he gets it himself."

"What sort of information?"

"For one thing that the dead man had a record as

long as your arm, to quote Lieutenant Crisp's picturesque argot. Waldemar Breithaupt was convicted early in his career for carrying burglar tools, very much as he did at Storm House the other night when he closed his career against his will."

"Carrying burglar tools the other night was a cover-up for what he really was after," Kay persisted, "in case he got caught."

"Probably, but there's more to it than that. Breithaupt was arrested several times, but never convicted, for attempts to assault children. Which means, it seems to me, that instead of trying to hurt Wink on somebody else's orders to help the other person inherit money, he was doing it all for mania's sake. That makes a lot more sense in the situation, odd as it may sound."

"Either that," Kay began, "or—"

"Or what?" Rolf asked politely as she hesitated. "Something unpleasant has just popped into your head, Kay. I can tell that much by looking at you. Go on and say it."

"I was going to suggest that he may be a hired killer who goes after children when he's paid to."

"That really would be an odd specialty." His warm smile robbed the words of scorn. "I'd certainly like to have seen his business cards."

"Not every hired killer gets away with each crime, I suppose, and this man Breithaupt must have bungled a job occasionally and been picked up by the police afterwards. I can't believe that a maniac would be so extraordinarily careful and patient over a long period of time in tracking one child."

"I'd suggest that what you can't believe is that the crisis is over," Rolf said easily.

She kept herself from gaping at him. "I beg your pardon? What did you say?"

"That you prefer to live in a crisis and feel you're needed for every second of the day rather than concede

that the crisis is finished and done with." He shrugged. "It puts some flavor into what people consider are their dull lives, and the reaction is a pretty ordinary one. I'm not a believer in happiness through crises as a way of life myself, but I can understand it in others."

Kay blinked rapidly to hide the moisture that threatened to flood her eyes.

"Are you serious about this?" she asked.

"Of course." He got to his feet and resumed the golfing position he had taken before she'd walked into the room. "There are people like members of juvenile gangs and those with persecution complexes who seem to think that the highest goal to which a human being can aspire is to be the central figure in a melodrama. Not a tragedy, you understand; that's old hat. Melodrama is tragedy for a democratic age."

Kay said bluntly, "I can do without philosophizing and moralizing little lectures about what you think is wrong with me."

"I wasn't moralizing or making judgments," he said, adding agreeably, "and I'll let you miss some good philosophy if you insist."

"What I want to know is whether you plan to keep on guarding Wink," she said as briskly as she could manage. "I take it that you don't."

"Right you are," he nodded. "Wink can go anywhere and do anything at all, subject to the obligations we've put on him and the need to be taken care of. There aren't going to be any extra guards from now on in his life."

"Are you firing Bert Gibson?"

"Not at all. Bert is a good handyman and he seems to like his job."

"I see." She noticed his hands gripping the golf club tautly and added with as much sting as she could put into the words, "I'm sorry I bothered you."

"Not at all," he said blandly. "Anytime, Kay. I only hope we're still friends."

He was talking absently, his head down and concentrated on golf form. Kay said quietly and truthfully:

"No, we're not."

It pleased her to see that his hands had slipped down along the club out of sheer surprise. Then she turned and left for her bedroom.

There was no feeling of pleasure in Kay though, as she got herself ready for bed. She wasn't creating the emergency that terrified her. At the very least it hadn't been proved whether the dead man was a hired killer or a lunatic, and considering the last few months' experience it would have been worth-while to keep watching Wink closely for at least a little longer.

Kay stared gravely at her face in the mirror as she sat brushing her hair. There would be no point to telling the police what was on her mind. Lieutenant Crisp would obviously be swayed by the Storm influence and prestige in the area. Even if Crisp could be overruled by higher authority there was no proof to be had about what Kay would tell them. The police weren't going to be able to do a single solitary thing about protecting a child whose guardian claimed that he needed no extraordinary protection whatever.

Kay Campbell was left to take care of the child and guard against the possibility of a faked accident. But she was left, too, with one ally; a man who almost certainly cared for the child more than Jessica and Rolf did. She was so comforted by the feeling that she wouldn't have to do the entire job by herself that she fell asleep as soon as her head struck the pillow.

Fourteen

IT WAS raining lightly by breakfast time on Monday morning, and Kay decided that she and her charge wouldn't leave the house for study, at least not till

after lunch. A room had been set aside for such emergencies as well as for winter use, a room with a single chair-desk unit and a blackboard. It seemed typical of her present situation that though the equipment gleamed with cleanliness there were no erasers or chalk for the blackboard and not one scar or nick on the desk. To Kay, with her public school training, there was something nearly heretical about a desk with no message scrawled on it, not even the usual drawing of a tombstone inscribed: TO ALL THOSE WHO DIED WAITING FOR THE BELL TO RING.

Of course Satellite was present in the small room. The chocolate-brown bulldog seemed none the worse for having been drugged and then spending some time at the vet's. But he was subdued when indoors, and his presence didn't give the sense of barely-smothered anarchy that Kay had grown so used to in her Civil Service tenure.

It was odd to hear Jessica saying somewhat the same thing at lunch. This happened to be one of those rare lunches that Kay shared with all the Storms since the weather was effectively keeping them indoors and Mrs. Eagan was preparing a special treat for dinner. The kitchen smelled like a shoe factory.

"I have an idea," Jessica said, "that solitary instruction may be all wrong for a young child. Somebody like Wink needs the presence of other children his own age."

"More accurately," Rolf grinned, buttering a roll, "you need the absence of a governess."

"I won't be sorry to see the present one leave," Jessica said as if Kay wasn't in the room, let alone in earshot. "Wink can be sent to a military school, where at least he'll learn how to handle a fork."

Wink, who had been mashing lettuce with the fork as if it were a club, reluctantly positioned his fingers in the correct manner.

Rolf said tolerantly, "That's the wrong shot to

make when you're trying to get out of the rough, young fellow—or in this case out of the roughage."

Jessica made a point of saying that she thought any mention of an idiotic game like golf was itself idiotic and that as the child's guardian her brother should try teaching him inoffensive table manners.

"About school, though," she added. "The current school term ends in June, you know. We can ship the boy off to a small and expensive—"

Kay put in quietly, "You mean 'ship *it* off', don't you? There's no point in talking about it as if it were alive and had any feelings of its own."

Jessica's firm chin was thrust out as she turned to Rolf. "Are you going to let me stand exposed to such insolence?"

Not for the first time, Rolf stubbornly resisted attempts to heighten feelings in his presence.

"At least you can't blame Miss Campbell's dislike for you on Storm House acting up again."

"At least I know that when I'm in a difficulty my brother won't stand beside me." She lit a cigarette in the ever-present jewelled holder. "I've made up my mind once and for all, Rolf, to dispose of the services of any governess by the end of the current school term."

Kay glanced at the child, then said to Rolf, "I think there's a better time for you and your sister to talk about this."

"The dear child's appetite is probably affected," Jessica said witheringly. "How dreadful!"

Rolf made his voice flat. "I can see that you care for the child, too, Jessica. It's just that you hide your feelings all the time."

Not waiting for a reply, he grinned at Kay.

"At least you've got over a month to make a little gentleman out of my nephew—and Jessica's, of course."

With a mocking smile Kay said:

"I'll take the practical advice you gave me last night

very much to heart, Mr. Storm, and not treat it as a crisis."

Rolf threw up his hands in feigned despair.

"Now *you* hate me, too," he complained. "Heaven help the man who's stupid enough to try and smooth things over between two women. What happens to him makes the Curse of Storm House look like a Sunday picnic by comparison!"

If Kay was now expected to do her work badly and make it easier for Rolf to fire her for that reason, then Jessica was going to have yet another disappointment. Kay went at the afternoon's teaching with a sharpness and intensity that took Wink by surprise.

The rain had slacked off by three o'clock, and Kay dismissed Wink reluctantly. He ran out of the room with Satellite yapping at his heels.

Kay looked out the classroom window and saw the two of them running toward the flat land for an afternoon's pleasure. When he was lost to sight, Kay walked out and carefully tried to locate him without being obvious about it or letting Wink know he was being watched. He was near the other end of the field. From where Kay stood it sounded as if he was engaged in a shouting match with the usually phlegmatic Satellite.

The boy moved back further. Kay whipped out a pair of opera glasses to keep him in sight. She had focused with care when she heard a surprisingly keen voice at her side:

"What are you up to?"

It was Bert Gibson. She hadn't seen him so far during the day, and felt she could talk to him honestly.

"I'm keeping trāck of the boy."

Bert had just come out from the garage. He wiped his hands with a piece of waste, ignoring an oil smear the size of a question mark across one sunburnt cheek.

"What are you doing that for?" he asked.

"You know perfectly well that the child is still in

danger. The Storms have sold themselves a bill of goods about the dead man having been out of his mind and the only one responsible for what's been happening to Wink. Somebody has to help me take care of the child."

Bert ran a reasonably clean forefinger under the collar of his shirt and awkwardly stared down at his feet.

"Well now, I've been told to leave the kid alone and handle him like there's nothing wrong at all any more. You know what I mean? The kid has got his life and I've got my work and the two don't get together except every so often."

The scent of wet earth became cloying to Kay as she listened, realizing that the one person she had expected to remain on her side had gone over to the side of his employers. She'd been wrong to expect that Bert Gibson would join her in any independent gesture or go against orders.

"You can follow any orders you want to," Kay said, raising her opera glasses for the second time. "Don't talk to me about it, though."

Despite Kay's will, the glasses were gently lowered.

Bert Gibson said apologetically, "I've got other orders, too, Miss Campbell."

"That's no reason for interfering with me."

"Yes it is, I'm afraid." In his embarrassment he stared at a point above her head. "Mr. Rolf told me that you're the hysterical-minded type of woman and that you'd prefer to believe that the boy is still in trouble. Mr. Rolf said that you would probably try to be a one-girl secret service, and that if I saw you doing it I should stop you."

"I understand," Kay said slowly. "And you always follow orders."

There wasn't anything more to be said. Bert Gibson turned around and walked slowly back to the garage. Kay wondered if she could guess how he himself felt about what was happening, but his own feelings didn't

seem to matter to him as long as the Storms felt differently.

Kay didn't put the opera glasses up to her eyes again, but she stayed in place squinting as far as she could into the distance. Wink was a quivery dot located at shifting points below the horizon.

It was then as she stood watching what she was able to see of him that an idea occurred to her. Without knowing it was there it seemed to be printed across her consciousness rather like part of the day's lesson on a blackboard:

If nobody is guarding him, then Wink is in danger. To get him away from the source of danger, now that he isn't being guarded, would be an easy thing to do. In a way, the Storms have made this job very easy.

For her to take the child away from his danger was the very last thing that the Storms would expect Kay to do. With all his moralizing about the impossibility of unselfish love for a stranger, Rolf didn't understand the lengths to which a woman could go in order to save a child. Rolf, to be honest about it, didn't understand any number of things about the girl he had hired to help protect his nephew.

But he'd know better very soon now.

She would have to decide just exactly where to take Wink when he'd been brought out of Storm House. Most importantly at the moment, though, she had to get the boy away from the tender loving care of his guardian and his darling aunt. Heaven knew that there wasn't any time to lose.

Part Three
THE END OF ETENITY

Fifteen

THE SIMPLEST way of getting the child out of Storm House didn't occur to Kay till evening, but by then it was too late to use the idea before next day. She decided to get as much sleep in the meantime as she could; tomorrow was going to be unusually difficult.

Sleep came hard for her, but it was dreamless up to the last few moments when she suddenly discovered herself running with the child on a treadmill that looked suspiciously like Jessica's cigarette holder at first and then like one of Rolf's drug-induced lithographs about a vacuum that he had called paradise. Her lips were pressed firmly against the bedquilt when she mercifully woke up.

To check the boy's homework and approve it, except for the French, took Kay only a few minutes. She was waiting for him in the summerhouse, where Jessica had the spectacularly bad taste to put in a pony-tail tree that on close examination turned out to be artificial. If Jessica could've brought herself to do it, she'd have kept artificial grass and trees outdoors all year round.

Not long after Wink arrived, Kay used the artificial tree as a starting point in a talk about the nature of growing things.

"We can almost see grass and flowers in growth at this time of the year," Kay said; then added as if she had just thought of it, "Would you like to take a field trip?"

"Sure."

"All right, then," she said. "Go and ask Bert for the keys to the Chevvy and we'll take our trip."

With half-humorous affection she watched the child running over to the garage. It would be suitable if she didn't look too anxious about joining him. She paused long enough to zip up all the books in a briefcase, except for the one that dealt with trees and flowers. When that particular book was under her left arm at last, Kay felt ready to step out of the summerhouse for what would almost certainly be the last time.

If her major concern hadn't been for the child's welfare she knew she'd probably have been sad at the prospect of leaving such a beautiful home in spite of a woman who scorned what was alive and behaved respectfully to anything inanimate; as well as a man who could show considerable interest in painting and lithography and golf, but also an interest in LSD-25. It did seem to Kay in spite of her preoccupation, that an interest in hallucinating drugs and in golf should belong to a couple of different men. If one of those men was the real Rolf Storm, then the other represented the putting on of a mask. And why, when you came right down to it, would Rolf Storm feel that he had to wear a mask?

Kay shook her head fiercely. Half-formed speculations made under a state of increasing tension were likely to be far astray from the truth.

She was halfway to the garage when she saw that Wink was sitting outside it on a wooden barrel, swinging the backs of his shoes heavily against wood. He waved to her as she approached.

Kay would have expected to find him in the Chevvy and experimenting with its horn. She wasn't more than a dozen feet away when she called out: "Haven't you got the car keys?"

"You have to see Bert for them."

She nodded grimly at the handyman having taken what might be considered a safety precaution. Strictly speaking, it wasn't necessary. If he'd been ordered not to let the car keys into Wink's hands under any condi-

tions, though, Bert was likely to treat that order as something handed down from Mount Sinai.

She found him sitting gingerly on the front fender of the station wagon. In one hand he carried a soft drink bottle, which he was swigging from as she walked into the garage. The moment he heard Kay's footsteps he put down the bottle and wiped his lips with the back of a palm.

A mildly autocratic approach would be the best way of handling him. Kay walked over to the Chevvy and around it to the driver's door.

"I'd like the keys, Bert," she said quietly.

"Oh yes, Miss Campbell," he said, but there wasn't any rush to comply that Kay could detect in his voice. In fact, he seemed more ill-at-ease in her company than was usual even for him.

"Well?"

"Could I see your driver's license, Miss?"

Kay blinked. "Is that strictly necessary?"

"Yes, Miss Campbell, it is. You see, the cars from Storm House are very well known around here, and you might be stopped if you're behind the wheel. After all, the State Police don't know who you are, and they might figure you stole this pile of—this car, I mean."

"I don't have a license with me, but Wink will be in the car, too, and he's a Storm."

"That's true, but—uh, the State Police are very likely to stop you, then, if you're a stranger and Wink is in the car with you."

"Do you mean that they might think I'm kidnapping the child?"

Bert flushed, as she had expected he would.

"I'm sure you wouldn't be," he started.

"If there's any trouble, Bert, I'll simply tell the State Police that I'm taking Wink on a field trip to see his book on flowers and trees come alive."

"Well, you see, Miss—"

"Go on," she said as Bert paused irresolutely.

"I didn't want to mention it, but there's been trouble with the State Police on account of the traffic rules. Miss Jessica follows them religiously when she drives, but Mr. Rolf can't figure out why he should have to follow the rules if he's such a good driver as he thinks he is, so that the police are always looking for Storm House cars and ready to give out warnings. Miss Jessica doesn't have too much trouble and neither do I, but if they see a stranger and—this is the point, much as I hate to mention it—that stranger doesn't happen to be licensed, there really will be more trouble."

"Bert," she said, indicating by her tone that she wasn't going to be in good temper much longer, "all you have to do is give me the car keys."

"Just a moment, Miss Campbell, please. I promise it won't take long."

He hurried to a closet and picked up a phone receiver, waiting respectfully for an acknowledgment at the other end.

"Mr. Storm? Miss Campbell asked me to give her the Chevvy keys so as she can take Billy out for a drive, and I don't know what I should do. . . . I can't see any real harm in letting her have the keys, but you remember the troubles that you—I mean *we,* have been going through with the State Police, and I'm sure Miss Jessica will get sore if anything happens to one of the cars in the wrong hands. . . . Yes, Mr. Storm. All right, Mr. Storm, that's a good idea. I'll see you afterwards, then, as soon as I get finished."

Bert hung up and stood wiping the back of his neck. He finally took out the car keys and unlocked the door from the side opposite Kay. She opened her door after a moment only to find him sitting diffidently behind the wheel.

"What are you up to?" she demanded.

"Mr. Storm's orders Miss," he said with his usual politeness. "I'm to drive you and Billy on your trip."

Kay only made one more attempt to talk him out of it. "The trip may take all day, Bert, and I'm sure you've got really important work to attend to in the house."

"Mr. Storm ordered me to do this first," the handyman said as if he was repeating some speech he had memorized long ago.

"Very well, Bert."

Their trip took most of the morning, and Kay was hard put to it finding material enough to justify even a short drive like this one. Her heart sank when Bert headed the car back toward the house from which she knew she had to take the child at all costs.

As she dressed herself for dinner on Tuesday evening, Kay reflected that the trip hadn't been wasted. She had convinced herself that it would be impossible for her and the child to walk into Kinnina, which meant that she'd have to get transportation.

There was at least one person connected with Storm House who might be some help.

Kay was buttoning the back of her long dinner dress when the idea came to her. She smiled at her image in the bathroom mirror and decided that she looked as wholesome as the new bedroom. She had refurnished it slowly over the last few weeks from the shutter-built tester bed draped in French toile to the fieldstone motif in the bathroom. Jessica's complaints about the new requirements had made Kay more determined than ever to have the sort of bedroom she wanted.

Below, in the kitchen, Mrs. Eagan was standing by the maple chopping block with built-in drawers underneath. Freshly baked pastry had been put on the chopping block in a tray, and she was obviously waiting for something else to be processed in the two large ovens under the eight-burner gas range. In the meantime, she was carefully reading the obituary pages of the *New York Times,* the only section of that august newspaper which held her interest.

"Here's a man in the advertising field and a vice president of some agency," she was saying to Arlene, the young maid, as Kay walked in. "Only forty-eight years old and he dies of a heart attack. It shows you that money don't bring happiness and long life. Money is one thing and good health is something else altogether."

"I had an aunt who died at forty-six," Arlene offered perkily, as if to top the exploit of Mrs. Eagan's vicariously made acquaintance.

"And here's Mrs. Gaylord Fox dying at fifty-two of a long illness—you know what that means, every time. I used to see her over here once in a while. Three fur coats she had, mind you, Arlene, three of them. Now here's a woman who died at eighty-four—that's not a bad age at all, Arlene."

Kay waited till Arlene had left the kitchen before bringing up the subject that was on her mind.

"Mrs. Eagan, how do you get away from Storm House when you have two days off?"

"By car, of course," the buxom cook said, glancing from the stove to Kay. "And it'll be a pleasure to be eating out for Wednesday and Thursday, believe me, though the food in most restaurants could shrivel a whale."

"Then you have a car, Mrs. Eagan?"

"Not on your life," the cook said, dashing Kay's hopes. "But my daughter does.

"Does she lend it to you? Because I was wondering if you might just possibly lend it for a very short time—"

"I wouldn't know what to do with a car if it *was* loaned to me. Cooking takes enough from a body without having to drive a car. My daughter drives me away and back."

"That's very nice for you," Kay said with as much warmth as she could bring to it.

"She says it relieves her tension, but I suppose she

gets all tensed up from not doing much of anything all day long. Her husband is assistant clerk at the Kinnina courthouse, which is one of those honest and respectable Civil Service jobs that any man is able to get provided he plays politics all the time. But he's a decent and god-fearing man, a McHugh, even if he does eat like a whole Army regiment."

Kay, who had never met a mother-in-law without the firm conviction that the man who'd married her daughter was a glutton, deftly cut off the pending discussion of her son-in-law's imaginary mistreatment of the former Miss Eagan.

"I'm glad you don't have any trouble getting out of Storm House and back," she said easily. "I think I'll be going into the dining room and let myself be surprised by what comes out from the kitchen."

"Take the advice of an old woman, dear, and buy a car for yourself," Mrs. Eagan called after her. "Why, if I was thirty years younger I'd probably be a racing driver and not a cook."

Kay smiled. Tempting as the notion may have been to buy a car of her own, the thing would still have to be garaged. Somebody connected with the house was likely to be in a position to keep her from getting away. And it would take too much time to arrange. The sooner she took Wink out of danger, the better.

She thanked Mrs. Eagan for the advice, and walked into the dining room for a dinner that turned out to be one of the best that Kay had ever eaten at Storm House. It would have been much more pleasant if not for Jessica's sniping at the child and at Rolf. Wink grew awkward and uncomfortable under pressure, but when Jessica turned from him he resumed eating with gusto. The next time Jessica glanced ominously at the child, she saw Kay's hand gently stroking one of his. She looked up at the governess' determined eyes and refrained from making any further comment about Wink.

Rolf turned away his sister's gibes with the usual soft smile and any number of noncommittal remarks. If he was indeed wearing a mask, as Kay had been thinking not too long ago, it fit him so well that she for one simply couldn't guess how he felt toward his sister. . . .

Not till after bedtime for Wink did Kay go into her room and put through a call to her friend in Garden, Fran Carslake. It was Fran, a legal secretary, who had first told Kay about the news story in the Garden *Eagle* that soon cost her the job at public school teaching.

"Why, hello stranger," Fran said, her voice in the high whine that she generally adopted. "Long time no hear."

"Fran, I wonder if you could do me a very important favor," Kay said. "Would you be able to come out to Storm House (I've told you where the place is) late tomorrow afternoon? In your car, of course."

Fran said regretfully, "I guess you didn't hear."

"Hear what?"

"About my car."

Apparently, Fran was destined to give her bad news whenever the two of them talked on the phone.

Warily Kay asked, "Has something happened to it?"

"The car is practically smashed, that's what," Fran said. "I was driving past the border sign going towards New York when a darned little red Volkswagen turned a corner and I crashed right into a fence to keep from hitting it."

"That *is* too bad," Kay said sincerely, regretful for Fran's sake as well as her own.

Fran warmed to her friend's sympathy. "Then the driver gets out and comes over to me and says the accident is my fault entirely because I didn't have to swerve the car as much as I did. And why was he practically driving down the middle of the road? Because,

he says, nobody was coming till I suddenly showed up; so what difference could it make where he positioned himself?"

"Sounds like my ex-boy friend," Kay said. "You know who I mean. Charles Bundy."

"This *was* Charles Bundy," Fran said with bitterness. "If you need a car bad enough, call him up. He's asked after you, Kay, so help me. I'm sure he's still stuck on you."

"Charles is stuck on the notion of being married," Kay told her friend. "He'd get more status in the community and at the bank after he goes through with it."

"Well, I only hope some girl who's a good driver marries him," Fran said.

They spoke for a long time, exchanging such gossip as Fran knew and Kay had heard during her most recent visit to Garden. One of their mutual friends was engaged and it took Fran as much as five minutes to render a critique in depth of their friend's engagement ring, the wedding plans and the prospective groom's table manners. She ended by predicting that if the marriage did take place it wouldn't last more than six miserable months.

Kay was still left with a problem when she put down the phone. It was nine-thirty on Tuesday night and she didn't have any intention of letting the truly important matter simply hang fire indefinitely. She knew perfectly well what her next move was going to be for several moments before she spoke it to herself.

Carefully she dialed Charles Bundy's home in Garden.

The connection rang six times. Kay wouldn't give up. On the seventh ring she was rewarded. The phone was lifted on the other end. A sleep-drugged voice asked:

"Who's it?"

Kay swallowed before answering. She might have known that her luck was going to be bad. The person

on the other end of the connection was Charles' mother, with whom he still lived. Mrs. Bundy stopped fighting back a yawn and let it out across the wire.

"I sleep so good when I'm in front of the television," she explained unselfconsciously, "but when I get into bed it's like I expect to be paid by the hour for sleeping, so I just lay there with my eyes wide open."

"Mrs. Bundy, this is Kay."

"Who?"

"Kay Campbell. I'm sure you remember me."

"Oh. You *used* to be a friend of Charles's."

Kay sighed. "I take it he's not home."

"The bank is having it's semiannual bowling tournament and Charles is defending his championship."

She seemed awed, as if she was directing Kay's attention to a great natural wonder of the world.

"Do you have any idea when he'll be home?"

"Charles usually gets back early enough to watch the eleven o'clock news with me," Mrs. Bundy said. "He knows I like to go to sleep right after that, and if he comes in when I'm asleep it wakes me up."

And probably his mother complained so much about being awoken that Charles made matters easier for himself and got home by eleven o'clock on week nights.

"I'll call him again later on," Kay said.

"Not too late, mind you! Charles has to get a good night's sleep so he can put in a full day's work tomorrow."

And *I'm* not working, of course, so it doesn't matter, Kay thought bitterly.

As if in answer to Kay's unspoken remark, Mrs. Bundy said, "You can get right to work without having to go downtown and all that. You're at the Storms' house, my son tells me. All I can say is that I wouldn't live in the Storms' place no matter what."

Kay doubted very much whether that was all Mrs. Bundy could say. Charles' mother was able to hold forth on any subject, no matter how trivial it was or

how little knowledge she had of it. Kay repeated that she'd call again, and hung up with a feeling of relief.

She never remembered afterwards what she had done to put in the time between her first call to the Bundy house and her second call. It was ten past eleven when she phoned again. The sound of a television set being operated could be heard in the background as the receiver was picked up on the other end. Charles cleared his throat before speaking.

"Hello? Who is this?"

"It's Kay, Charles. Didn't your mother tell you I had called earlier?"

"Yes, she mentioned it. What can I do for you now, Kay?"

It was amazing how clearly she could see him as if he were standing in front of her, gray temples at thirty-two and dressed in charcoal gray, the shirt crisp and white, the tie knotted to perfection itself. She could hardly imagine him dressed in any other way, even for bowling, but she guessed he owned a discreet and conservative sports outfit for such an informal occasion.

Kay collected her thoughts with some difficulty.

"I need an important favor," she said with bluntness. "Can you drive up here tomorrow afternoon at about three or four o'clock?"

"I'd like to help, Kay, in spite of everything," he said, carefully polite, "but having to explain my leaving the bank so early is quite a chore. My boss isn't likely to say no, but I can't see any reason for getting him upset."

"Charles, this is terribly important."

"Can you tell me what it's about?"

"Not over the phone."

"I suppose your line is tapped," Charles said with that heavy joviality of his. "If I can't judge how important it might be, Kay, how can you expect me to help? I get the impression from this secrecy of yours that I might go out to where you are and find that you

have to buy a dress or some such thing to impress Rolf Storm."

"Won't you take my word for the importance of your coming out here, Charles?"

"Oh, I'm sure it seems important," he agreed.

"What time could you make it, Charles?" she asked, resigned to the inevitable. "Any time that's convenient for you."

"Well, let me see. Tomorrow is a big day, what with one thing and another. There's a Rotary luncheon and an after-three conference at the bank. I'm sure I could get out to Storm House at about eight o'clock tomorrow night. That's really the best I can do, Kay. I'll admit all the stores will be closed and you won't be able to buy any little gimcrack that you might have decided you need me and the car for, but the most convenient time for me is eight o'clock."

She couldn't afford to hesitate, no matter how hard it might be to get Wink out of the house at night. Easy or hard, though, she'd have to figure out a way of doing just exactly that.

"Eight o'clock it is, then, Charles," she said. "I'll be expecting you, and thanks."

She breathed a sigh of partial relief, at any rate, when she broke the connection. As usual before going to sleep she hurried to Wink's room, opened the door part way, and held her breath till she could hear the boy sleeping softly. She closed the door on him for the last time that night and went to bed. She needed as much rest as she could get. Tomorrow was going to be *the* difficult day for her, heaven knew.

Sixteen

WEDNESDAY MORNING at the Storms' place, as Mrs. Bundy would have called it, was clear and crisp. Charles' mother might not have wanted to live here "no matter what", but on a morning like this one Kay had no desire to live anywhere else. She couldn't help regretting that she'd probably never see another morning at Storm House.

Wednesday was change-of-sheets day, as it happened. Kay discovered the huge canvas carriage jammed with used sheets and pillowcases in front of her door as she came up after lunch to find part of her lesson plan. Arlene, the young maid, was industriously gathering Kay's sheets and pillowcases into a package to be rolled up and dropped into the canvas carriage. She looked flushed with more than just exertion.

"So help me, Miss, there are times when I want to quit," Arlene said in response to Kay's sympathetic greeting. "I've really had it."

"What's wrong?"

"There are some people who've got no consideration for others," Arlene said darkly. "They think that other people are like machines and can be turned on and off."

"I only know one person at Storm House I'd say that about," Kay put in, thinking of Jessica.

"You've picked the right one, Miss Campbell, I'm sure," Arlene said, glowering at the inoffensive bedsheets. "I'm not made of concrete."

And with that indisputable statement, she left Kay to wonder what domestic crisis had erupted at Storm House. She was to find out for herself before long.

Jessica was at the foot of the stairway when Kay descended a little later on for her afternoon's work

with the child. Rolf's sister was so much absorbed in judging the effect of a painting against the far wall that she didn't hear Kay's approach till a near-collision loomed. Kay automatically apologized, but regretted it when she saw the other woman's blank acceptance of the fact that she was the one who had caused the difficulty.

"Before I forget," Kay said, "I'm expecting a friend over at eight o'clock. He's arriving to pick me up, so don't be surprised when you see a stranger on the grounds tonight even if he'll only be at Storm House for a few minutes."

"Have him use the back staircase," Jessica snapped.

Kay halted in mid-stride. "I won't let any friend of mine use the service entrance."

"He won't get inside, otherwise. My brother and I will be entertaining some people tonight, and I don't want anybody else underfoot."

She resumed her study of the painting.

Kay was tempted to put up a fierce argument, but fresh considerations halted her. Not only hadn't she expected that the Storms would be gathered together at the crucial time tonight, but a reasonably alert Rolf would be acting as co-host to what Jessica disdainfully called "some people". Wasn't it possible, then, that Kay might not be able to get the child away from Storm House in order to leave with Charles?

She wasn't at her best in teaching Wink for the afternoon. Not for the first time she was sorry that she couldn't find the placid anonymity with which a teacher was able to address forty-some children. Wink, for his part, had no way of taking refuge in being one of a mass. He had to be continually alert while Kay communicated directly with him. It wasn't necessarily true, as she was finding out, that small classes always made for more comfortable teacher-pupil relations.

Kay commuted Wink's sentence as well as her own at two-thirty, and dismissed him for the day. As he was

romping with Satellite not far from the house and in plain sight, she didn't hesitate in going about her business. She was planning to take a shower and make certain which items could be left behind and which ones she had to take with her on the flight from Jessica and Rolf Storm.

At a few minutes after three she remembered Charles' having remarked that he'd be at a bank conference, and put through a call to him.

He sounded pleased and important when he took the call, as Kay had expected, but lowered his voice noticeably when he learned who was on the other end.

"What on earth has happened now?" he asked querulously.

"There's not too much point in talking about that," Kay said, forebearing to tell Charles about Jessica's recently laid down strictures. "The point is that you mustn't come to the house when you get in the neighborhood."

"I don't unders-—" he interrupted himself, raising his voice and sounding more pompous. "Of course I couldn't have agreed to it just now because I'm on the phone and it was impossible, but I'd be only to happy to volunteer, Mr. Bookbinder."

Kay waited, fingers taut on the telephone.

"Yes, Kay?" Charles asked silkily. "What were you just telling me?"

"Please listen carefully because this is very important. Just before you arrive at the Storm grounds there's a wooden bridge about twenty feet long. It's very rickety and it squeaks if you get on to it."

Kay had mentally marked the place as a landmark worth remembering when she and Wink were being driven out to the countryside by Bert Gibson at the time when Kay thought she had been about to make her escape with the child. Even then she'd realized that the more landmarks she knew in this vicinity the more she'd be able to use any help she might receive.

"All right," Charles said. "I suppose you want me to wait there for you."

"Please, Charles. Just to the left there's a grove of trees. If you're there by eight o'clock I'll join you, and I'll be everlastingly grateful."

And of course, she added to herself, I'll bring another passenger with me should that be at all possible.

"There's only one thing you've overlooked, Kay," he said, his voice rich with satisfaction. "I've just found out that I can't make it on time or even close to that time."

"What do you mean?"

"As a matter of fact it's partly your fault. If I hadn't been on the phone just now I could've explained that I'd be unable to volunteer for a special job tonight —there's no need to give you the details. As it is, my acceptance was taken for granted and I'd probably start up some slight antagonism if I said no. You heard me before when I said that of course I'd take care of the job. There was really no alternative at the time, Kay, and it does make matters simpler for me to let the decision stand."

"Charles, you've got to help me tonight." Kay pitched her voice at a low and intense level. "This is vitally important, believe me."

"But the bank's welfare is much more important to me at the moment than any girl," Charles explained carefully. "I'd do it if it wouldn't interfere with my job. As it is, Kay, I'll be tied up for a few hours tonight at the very least."

"What time can you get here?" Kay persisted.

"Do you mean to tell me that I should come out even after I get done?"

"Yes."

"Well now, I can't be sure how long this work of mine will take. It involves a conference at Harry Silverman's place and the odds are that I can't leave before eight o'clock or eight-thirty. Let's put it this way,

then. Since you need me this much, I'll be out there between ten-thirty and eleven o'clock."

Kay tried not to sound disappointed. "That's pretty late, I suppose, but it's much better than your staying away from here."

Charles had to sum up the conversation, of course, so that his decision would be unmistakably clear.

"You'll find me with my car in a grove of trees at the left of the little bridge before the Storm property. I should get there between ten-thirty and eleven."

"Fine."

"If I'm not there by eleven, you can bet that I've been delayed and I won't get there tonight, period. After all, I need a good night's sleep as much as anybody else does."

"Charles, you've *got* to be here!"

"As it is, my mother's going to chew me out when I tell her I'll be home late," he added, the sound of a pencil scratching on paper rising under his voice. "She worries if there's any sudden change in my routine."

Kay couldn't help thinking that Mrs. Bundy was likely to be far from delighted if she knew that Charles was planning to do a great favor for an ex-girl friend.

"I'll tell her some story or other about having to work very late, and it'll save me explanations," Charles decided. "It generally does."

By the time Kay politely broke the connection, she felt that her nerves were badly frayed.

She made a point of correcting Wink's homework and adding some notations that she hoped would be of help when she had to turn over his schooling to somebody else. While she was at it she decided that the only way out of the problem about what to do with Wink after she took him away from here was to bring him to the police. She'd give a statement that he was in danger of his life while he stayed at Storm House. She could only hope that Bert Gibson or some of the other

staff would be able to make themselves testify truthfully in support of what she'd say.

It was the waiting that raked at Kay's senses, this business of building one's entire day to a point that would occupy her for only a few minutes, relatively. It was like waiting for a plane to leave much later in the day, and meanwhile you sat around the apartment counting the hours till you could go to the airport.

Dinner was a light meal. Jessica, instead of being tense in her own right about arrangements for the coming visitors, simply took the excellence of the evening-to-come for granted. She was more interested in the fact that she had decided to do her room over again. Rolf, who hadn't taken any LSD-25 during the day and wouldn't be able to use the stuff at night, was hiding discontent as best he could. Wink, who had interrupted one of his innumerable experiments when it was time for dinner, ate hurriedly so he could get back to the work that much sooner.

Kay was pacing her room at eight-thirty when she heard the doorbell ring. She gritted her teeth. The doorbell rang again some fifteen minutes later. She decided that she could no longer go on pacing her room, and after she put Wink to bed she went downstairs.

It was her plan to go down to the cellar, where the rumpus room held a workbench for Wink's experiments, a ping-pong table, a pool table and, in the farthest corner, two hard chairs and a television set. Kay felt that she had been reduced to the lowest level of all in having to watch what her friends at Garden contemptuously called the idiot box—at least for an hour or two of hard-won diversion.

She heard a burst of laughter back of the library doors as she reached the first floor. There was the near-creak of a door, and the library suddenly opened on Rolf. He was wearing an evening jacket with a red sash across the waistline. In one hand he held a whiskey

glass, and Kay thought that she had never seen him looking so darkly handsome.

"Oh, it's you," he said, apparently relieved at the sight of her. "Come in and meet the guests."

There was no choice. Kay walked into the library, awash from floor-to-ceiling with books laid out neatly. In one of the leather chairs, his feet crossed and a fixed smile on his lips, sat State Police Lieutenant Crisp.

For a moment, looking firmly at the handsome man whose hair was almost as red as her own, Kay had the impression that her heart had lurched to an agonizing stop. Here was the man she wanted to see, the man she'd have to deal with when Wink was taken away; and yet he was at Storm House, co-operating in full with the Storms and obviously impressed by their surroundings as well as by these human beings with inherited wealth.

Jessica had been talking about pre-Columbian sculpture as Kay walked in. Her tone didn't change at Kay's entrance, nor did she seem to be paying much attention to how her comments were being received. The small dowdy woman in front of her, obviously Lieutenant Crisp's wife, listened numbly, eyes glazed.

"Excuse me, Jess," Rolf said, clearing his throat. "Mr. and Mrs. Crisp, I want you both to meet one of the finest women I know. This is our governess, Miss Campbell."

Lieutenant Crisp said nervously, "I've met Miss Campbell before—ah, it's nice to see you again."

Kay smiled sunnily, trying to put the man and his wife at ease. "Mr. Storm may think I'm what's called a beautiful human being, but I'm not sure exactly how he means that."

"If goodness makes a good woman," Rolf said, refusing to be put off by small talk, "then Miss Campbell has got to qualify as a good woman."

In hopes that the others wouldn't hear, Kay lowered her voice and said to Rolf:

"This is very embarrassing."

"You shouldn't be embarrassed," Rolf said loudly, his words coming out with more speed than usual. When he turned toward her Kay could smell scotch on his breath. "You are the possessor of what can be considered in this day and age as an unusual turn of mind, Miss Campbell. You believe that it is possible to care for someone and do it with absolutely no hope of a reward. That is to say, Miss Campbell, you believe in the capacity to love."

Mrs. Crisp, squirming awkwardly in a chair that was too big for her, glanced at her husband and said dutifully:

"Well, I'm sure we all believe in that."

"No we don't. That's what makes Miss Campbell here a collector's item, more precious than all the pre-Columbian sculpture ever known. The love of one human being for another has become old hat in most people's eyes. To commit yourself to somebody's welfare without expecting a reward is considered as a sucker play. We're living in an age of alienation, Mrs. Crisp, a time in which people are expendable but property is not. People don't love themselves any longer, Mrs. Crisp, so they're incapable of loving other people."

He swayed back and forth, relishing the silence he had caused. He smiled at Kay's embarrassment, not realizing that it was brought on in large part by Kay's self-knowledge that she was actively plotting against him. To make her embarrassment far more acute, it seemed to her that Rolf was being absolutely sincere.

"Probably, Mrs. Crisp," he added, "you are aware that you were invited here as the payoff, so to speak, for your husband's having been so kind to my sister and myself during the recent unpleasantness; and you want to see some very good furniture and get a notion of how wealthy people live from day to day. And there's the dividend of being inside what is considered

even nowadays to be a haunted house. I'm suggesting another payoff altogether, Mrs. Crisp, a chance to see a very rare and wonderful type of human being."

Kay called out, "Please stop!"

"And in case you think I'm lying, let me point out that the child, Wink, is happier and more at ease than at any time I can remember. He actually looks forward to the time he spends with Miss Campbell. Now there's more to it than the knowledge that she's being well paid for her work. It isn't so easy to fool a child into giving you his good will unless you've given him yours, not even a naturally well-tempered boy like Wink."

And he turned smilingly to his sister.

"I'd be surprised, Jessica, if you didn't agree with me."

In the act of lighting a cigarette, Jessica looked up. Match flame illuminated her tawny eyes and darkened the petulant twist of her lips.

"As I was saying, Mrs. Crisp," she began, ignoring her brother.

Rolf didn't insist on a direct response from her. He smiled at the lieutenant instead and remarked:

"You look like you're on my side, Andy."

"Y-yes, of course I am." Crisp made a point of winding his watch. "You know, I arrived here fifteen minutes after my wife did because of an emergency case, and I might have to leave very soon."

Rolf considered it gravely. "It's certainly your choice to make, Andy, whether you stay or not."

"Why, yes. As I say, I'd be sorry—"

"I appreciate that, Andy, and I hope you'll let me give you a lithograph before you go."

"That's very kind of you."

Rolf smiled. "You don't have to hang it if it makes you queasy."

"I give you my word that Mrs. Crisp and myself would think of it as an honor to have a lithograph of yours in our home."

"Yes," Rolf said, nodding, "I suppose that's probably true."

Kay left the room shortly after Rolf had gone out to get the lithograph. She walked down to the cellar TV. Her head hurt, and it seemed as if a ball of pain had settled itself just above her right eye.

With Lieutenant Crisp at Storm House, it was going to be harder for Kay to nerve herself to take the boy out of here. Wasn't it fair to say that her situation, already a difficult one, was becoming hellish?

She sat quietly, not looking at the blank screen. There was so little time to decide how to carry out her plan. One or two details . . .

Kay never knew how long she sat without moving or even blinking. She heard some noises upstairs. The front door was suddenly shut. Thinking that her own problems could very well be affected by the traffic upstairs, Kay walked to the first floor again. She saw nobody, and walked out to the kitchen. Arlene stood in front of a mirror and wiped off her shade-too-bright lipstick.

"Are you finished for the night?" Kay asked.

"Uh-huh, and just in time, too, or my feet would 'a dropped off."

"Do you know who came into the house or left in the last few minutes?"

"Sure I do. It was that man, the cop. They call him a lieutenant, but every one of them is a cop as far as I'm concerned. Nothing more or less. I knew a sergeant once and he was really something!"

Kay dismissed the maid's no doubt hard-won wisdom with a shrug. She felt as if a weight had fallen from her.

"So Lieutenant Crisp did leave after all, did he? Is his wife still here?"

"Uh-huh. It seems that there's some kind 'a emergency, he says. At least that's what I heard him telling Mr. Rolf in the hall. He was expecting a phone call

and when the phone rang half a dozen times on a bad connection, even though he couldn't hear a word, he took it for granted that it was his emergency call and made tracks. If you ask me, he was only too glad to get away from the house."

Kay could have told the maid that it wasn't Storm House itself which had probably dismayed Lieutenant Crisp; but she didn't bother. It occurred to her that if the house had actually pulled Crisp away, then perhaps Mrs. Eagan's theory was right after all and the house did like Kay. Simply considering the idea, even if for only a short while, was enough of a sign to Kay that she was thoroughly upset.

She had to regain her self-control, and a glance at the clock made it easy for her. There was no time to be nervous any longer, not at nine minutes past ten.

"Good night, Arlene," Kay said. Automatically she added, "I want to hear all about that police sergeant of yours some time."

"You bet," Arlene agreed, and picked up a copy of some confession magazine from a chair. "The girls in this magazine think they're so smart, but they don't know much."

And with a distasteful air as if she was holding a dead animal, Arlene carried the magazine at arm's length up to her room for a night's reading.

As for Kay, she left the kitchen and proceeded as silently as she could manage up to Wink's room. It was time to take him with her.

Seventeen

KAY HAD discovered over the last few weeks that Wink slept as if any cares he had in the world were suspended overnight. He would have required considerable waking up. She was hoping to be so quiet in getting

him away from the house that the child would sleep through it.

She carried a pencil flashlight and used it in finding his coat. Carefully, then, she raised the child and settled him into the coat, buttoning it against the cold. Wink stirred and mumbled, but didn't wake. An out-of-key snuffling from a point under the bed reminded Kay that the dog, Satellite, was here as well. Satellite, too, it seemed, was a blessedly sound sleeper.

She settled a black sleep mask over Wink's closed eyes, tying it against the back of his head in a gentle manner. There was nothing else she could do in advance. He would have to be carried.

Gingerly she lifted the boy in her arms, settling his head against her left shoulder. He was heavier than Kay had expected and even at this point she couldn't help wondering at an eight-year-old's capacity for sleep.

With as much speed as she could possibly make, Kay went out to the hall with her burden and started for the back stairs. She could see the light on in Arlene's room, where the maid probably lay in bed reading eagerly about the transgressions of teenagers and young wives.

Making her way down the stairs with the sleeping child in her arms was as difficult a chore as Kay had ever attempted. That she did it without losing balance was a miracle and nothing less. Even her father would've conceded from the depth of his skeptical Scottish soul (he used to call himself a Presbyterian agnostic) that it was a miracle. Indeed luck was with her.

The outer door was locked. Kay realized that there was some flexibility in her right hand. She used it to snap the lock, hoping to do it gently; the lock opened with a noise that sounded to her like an exploding bomb.

Wink slept.

(Oh, Kay Campbell, lassie, you're fortune's darling, tonight! It won't be far, now.)

The night was a cool one for early spring, and wind ruffled Kay's hair as well as the boy's when she stepped outside. The earth was soft underneath, and she tested every step before taking it.

Caution, as Kay's father might have suspected if he had known about the task on which his daughter had engaged herself, was what completely undid her immediate plans.

From where she stood, she could see the back of the house in a straight line illuminated by a halo of light from the library window. And she could hear voices through the open window, Rolf's and their guest's and, of course, the keen piercing tones of Jessica Storm.

"It's no business of mine whether Miss Campbell likes my plans or not," Jessica was saying. "She has to go and we have to put Wink into a military school. That's all there is to it, Rolf, and I see no reason to discuss the matter in front of Mrs. Crisp here."

"What you actually mean is that you don't want to talk about it when I'm drunk and liable to ask inconvenient questions." Rolf's voice was slurred. "All I'm saying, Jessica, is that any decision of yours is subject to change."

"Not this one, Rolf."

At the first sound of Jessica's voice, the child had stirred in Kay's arms. She was reminded of his similar behavior just after the most recent attempt on his life when Jessica's voice outside his room had nearly wakened him. And now he was really going to be aroused from sleep unless Kay could get him out of earshot before Jessica spoke again.

Mrs. Crisp put in hurriedly and anxiously, "You were asking about my hat a while ago, Miss Storm. Well, it's a scarf hat with a net frame and a kerchief over it. The ends are folded in front, you see. I bought it at—"

Jessica snorted as if it couldn't matter less. The breach of good manners was tactfully smoothed over by Rolf.

"It's very nice, Mrs. Crisp." Drunk or sober, Rolf allowed for the vanities of other people; but his attention was obviously centered on Jessica. "You don't care two hoots in hell about Wink. All you want is to get rid of Kay Campbell."

Jessica snapped, "I won't talk about it with a drunk."

Wink started to say something in his sleep, which forced Kay to make a complete halt. They were ten feet from the house and in spite of his mumbling he was still asleep. A tree loomed over her in the near darkness as if it was reaching out for Kay and her burden.

Mrs. Crisp, still anxious to distract her host and hostess, offered diffidently, "It's been a fascinating evening, but I really do have to go home and wait for my husband."

"Later," Jessica said firmly, at least keeping the three of them inside for a while longer. "As far as Wink is concerned—"

She had spoken the child's name with particular vehemence. Wink's mumbling grew louder and he shook his head. There was enough room back of the tree for the two of them to stand in such a way that they'd be hidden from the house. Kay brought him there and patiently put him down so that he was on his feet. With a deft motion she took the sleep mask off him.

"It's Miss Campbell," Kay said before Wink could call out. "Don't be afraid."

"But what are you doing?"

"I'm taking you on a trip."

"At night?"

He was rubbing his eyes fiercely. Not even in the cradle had he looked more defenseless, Kay was sure.

Improvising desperately she asked, "Don't you like to be up at night?"

"Sometimes."

"What about now?"

"I'm sleepy."

"You'll be able to sleep in the car."

"We're going for a car trip? Where to?"

"Into town. You'll get a chance to see what Kinnina looks like when most of the people in it are asleep. You'll like that."

Wink was willing to accept what she said, but he asked cautiously, "Can Satellite come?"

"No."

"He won't be any trouble," Wink insisted. "He's never any trouble."

The point was highly debatable. Kay said:

"You'll see him soon enough, dear, I promise."

"I don't want to go someplace without him."

"Whether you want to or not," Kay said, keeping her voice down in hopes that he'd follow her example, "this time you're going to do it."

Wink pouted.

Kay asked softly, "You don't think I'd hurt you, dear, do you? I'm not out to do you any harm, Wink, please believe me. I mean it for your own good."

She ought to have known the fruitlessness of talking to a child as if he was grown up. Wink simply accepted what she'd said and asked again:

"But can't I take Satellite with me?"

"No. And there isn't much time, so—"

"I gotta take the flying saucer."

"Wink, for heaven's sake, forget it!"

"I gotta have my flying saucer," Wink insisted. "I won't go no place without it."

The flying saucer was a cheap pseudo-scientific toy which sold for three ninety-eight. Wink, not yet able to distinguish between good toys and bad ones, apparently considered the flying saucer of his as the last word in manifestations from outer space. When Wink was given a new toy he would concentrate his energies

on nothing else for a period of days and then as likely as not he would forget about it. He had come to class earlier with the saucer in a hand, Kay recalled. When she'd told him to take it back he had left the summerhouse and returned with the saucer in a pocket, instead. She had shamed him into doing what she wanted, but it took half an hour of wasted time before Wink was able to give much thought to his lessons.

"Wink, you'll have the flying saucer as soon as you come back." If necessary, she'd buy him another one. "I give you my word about that. I promise."

"I'm not gonna go no place without the flying saucer," Wink said mulishly.

"Wink, darling, please liste- —"

"I gotta have it, I gotta!"

His voice was rising dangerously. To placate him, Kay gave a soothing nod.

"All right, dear. As soon as we get to the car, we'll ride back for the flying saucer."

"I don't want to go to no car if I haven't got the flying saucer with me."

There was going to be no help for it. She wanted nothing more urgently than to save the child's life, but at the same time she felt sure that she would have gratefully strangled him. There was no way of reconciling the attitudes, and she was under too much tension to try.

"All right," she said between clenched teeth. "No, don't move! Stay right where you are. I want you to promise you're not going to leave here till I come back."

"Okay."

"And you won't look out at me or at the house. Promise?"

"Uh-huh."

"Say so," she ordered, knowing that a child might not consider he had given his word unless it was done formally. "Say, 'I promise'."

"I promise. I won't move or look out till you come back. But where are you going?"

"Back to the house for that moronic toy of yours," Kay said.

Anger at herself and the child and at this ridiculous predicament would have made Kay forget all about caution in any matter of less importance. As it was, though, she retained control of herself. She hurried back to the house unobserved, letting herself in with no trouble. In Wink's room she hurried on tiptoes to the cupboard where Wink kept most of his toys. The flying saucer wasn't on the pile at the bottom, as a pencil flashlight showed. It wasn't with his clothing, either. The darn thing could have taken flight back to Mars or the factory from which it had come, for all Kay knew.

On a hunch she went to his bed and raised the pillow. By some process completely unknown to science he had been able to sleep soundly with the saucer-shaped monstrosity under his pillow.

None of her movements had disturbed Satellite, who slept soundly underneath the bed. The bulldog's *whuffwhuffle became briefly louder only when there was some* commotion downstairs, but he didn't wake up.

Kay closed Wink's door softly and went down by the back stairs. Arlene's room light had been shut off, Kay noticed, after only a relatively short time spent reading about confession magazine heroines. The flying saucer nestled in her large purse.

At the foot of the stairs, weaving silently with every step she took, stood Rolf Storm.

Kay halted on the fifth step, trying to control her facial expressions. Apparently she wasn't successful. As drunk as he was, Rolf watched her closely and winced.

"Sorry to see me?" he asked.

Kay managed to tell him, "Of course not."

"You jumped six feet in the air when you realized I was on the way up."

"It surprised me that you were using the back stairs."

"More convenient from the rumpus room where we took the woman. She looks like a fish, that woman does." He blinked carefully. "How 'bout you?"

"I don't understand."

"What are you doing here? Jess told me that some boy friend was gonna—*going to,* pick you up at eight o'clock. Matter of fact, that's what started Jess talking against you and me trying to build you up and say how good you are. Jess kept saying exactly the opposite."

"You mean," Kay asked, startled, "because I was going out?"

"Going out with some jerky boy friend." He patted the sash at his waist as if he were a movie hero in a Western who was tapping his guns. "I'd like to see what he looks like, that fella."

"He's an old friend." Kay laughed unconvincingly. "And now if you'll excuse me—"

"Where is he? S'posed to pick you up at eight o'clock, I remember Jess saying."

"He's been delayed, but I'm going to meet him right now."

"Oh." The fingers of his left hand slowly moved in and out. "Believe me, Kay Campbell, accidents will happen."

Kay moved forward. "You really have to excuse me."

"No, I won't excuse you or anybody else," Rolf Storm said with the petulance of a drunken man. "An accident *has* happened, as a matter of fact. Almost a bad accident."

"That's too bad, and some other time you must tell me all about it."

He held up his left hand, moving it back and forth. "Hit my palm against the wall. By accident. Every-

thing that happens in Storm House is an accident. I let out a yell you could've heard up in Albany itself."

Kay remembered having heard a commotion several minutes ago when she'd been searching Wink's room.

"I'm sorry, but I have to go now," she said. "I've got an important appointment."

"All right." Surprisingly he stepped to one side in order to let Kay through. "Go ahead with your boy friend and let me go upstairs to get more drunk. I can't stand to think of you and some other guy having a good time together."

Kay started to tell him heatedly that it wasn't going to be at all the sort of night he anticipated for her. There was no sense being drawn into further explanations, though.

"Good night, Mr. Storm."

She was on her way to the door when he said triumphantly:

"I'll tank myself up with the real goods, instead."

Though the movement nearly made Kay lose her balance, she turned around.

"The LSD, you mean?"

"Right," he said, grinning at her.

"You can't take that on top of whiskey, Mr. Storm —Rolf, I mean. You're liable to hurt your system very badly."

"Nobody cares whether I hurt myself or not," he said dramatically, striking a pose with his good hand raised. "If you cared you wouldn't be running out to that jerk of yours. Probably he's the same jerk I met in your apartment that time. I knew he was no good for you the minute I laid eyes on him."

"*I* don't want to see you hurt yourself," Kay said warmly. "I do care whether or not you take that LSD of yours on top of whiskey."

"As long as somebody cares, all right," he gave in, trying to bow from the waist and catching his balance

before he fell. "I tell you what I'll do. I'll get rid of the whiskey before I hop myself up with the new stuff. And if Bert Gibson is asleep at the switch when I'm on the stuff, well, I couldn't care less. He'll be missing the first chance to appreciate the greatest artwork of all time, maybe. It could be that I'll hit it tonight, maybe the one effect I've been gunning for in all this time."

Kay turned to see him walk slowly and carefully up the stairs, talking to himself at every step. She could never quite forget her glimpse of him moving at an unsteady gait in the opposite direction from the one that she was taking.

The wind outdoors caught her unawares again, and she hurried to the tree behind which she had left Wink. He'd probably kept the promise not to look out till she returned, as far as Kay could tell. He couldn't be seen at the time when he must've been hearing her approach. The boy's trust was a reward for everything she had gone through, and it stiffened her determination that no danger was ever going to haunt Wink Storm's life again for as long as she'd be able to help it.

"Here," she said, pulling the toy out of her purse. "Now let's run till we're out of sight of the house, Wink. We're already behind schedule."

She seemed to be running with him toward a sliver of moon no larger than paring from one fingernail. Wink, who could waste energy like a madman during the day, had now decided that he was tired and would only let himself run slowly. It was going to be a question of time till his steps settled into a heavy walk at medium speed. Luckily he kept up Kay's pace until the two of them had reached a point less than a hundred feet from the bridge. By that time she felt able to walk only a little more quickly than he was doing. It certainly was an odd experience for her to say to Wink, of all people: "Don't drag your feet like that."

She felt a rush of contentment when her steps first

struck the wooden bridge. Planks squealed underfoot as she walked, broadcasting their message of agony, but Kay couldn't have cared less. She had been holding Wink with her right hand in his, but now her grip loosened.

"It won't be long, Wink dear. I promise."

"All right."

Things were going to work out for her and the child, beyond question. As for Charles Bundy, she said to herself that he wasn't such a dry stick after all. Charles did indeed have possibilities. Take away the dull clothes from him, try to persuade him not to behave toward other people as if they were retarded; and he might turn into a man worth knowing in every way. He was a man who kept his word, a man whose promise once given was as solid as a deposit in the bank for which he worked. He was the last man on earth to waste his intellectual resources on hallucination-producing drugs.

Moonlight through the grove of trees to the left of the little wooden bridge on the other side showed Kay that no car was waiting for her—and, unknowingly, for Wink.

For a while she stood open-mouthed at the prospect of Charles failing to appear. According to her watch it was twenty minutes to eleven, and there was the possibility that he wouldn't come here at all. It was possible, too, that he had already come here and, seeing no sign of Kay, had simply turned his car around and gone back home. Maybe he had paused long enough to glance in curiosity at the outside of a lavish home in which his mother said she wouldn't live "no matter what". The Storms' place, as she had called it over the phone to Kay, could only be made out very dimly from here.

Kay wouldn't take the boy back. If necessary she would try to find a car going into Kinnina and hitch a ride for herself and Wink.

But she couldn't prevent tears of angry frustration from staining the corners of her eyelids.

Wink must have sensed her agitation. Carefully he asked:

"What's wrong, Miss Campbell?"

Kay allowed a moment's silence to pass. She caught a deep breath and said as lightly as she could:

"Nothing is wrong here, Wink, as far as I know."

"Where's the car that's gonna take us on a ride?"

"It'll be along in a very short time."

"Oh."

She was grateful that Wink accepted what she said, but at the same time couldn't help wishing that he'd be more skeptical. Granting that he had become fond of her, it still wasn't enough to account for such complacency on his part. He was not going to be equipped very well for grown-up living if he always believed what he was told by somebody to whom he had taken a liking. In one way, she'd have to disillusion him now.

"Wink," she said, "I was wrong about something."

"About what, Miss Campbell?"

"I think we're going to have to walk out to the highway."

"But why? What for?"

"To hitch a ride, Wink."

"What do you mean?"

She hesitated. How did you tell a child that his life would be in danger if he remained at the only home he knew? Wink might believe what she said because he was fond of her, but the shock would be more than he'd be able to swallow without some kind of emotional reaction. She didn't want to cope with it at this time.

"Take my hand, Wink," she said, having let him slip out of her reach, "and we'll go to—"

The car was coming.

She could recognize that sensible pace at which Charles invariably drove. The red Volks came into sight after a moment, apparently headed straight at

them. Kay blinked in the glare of headlights and instantly covered the child's eyes with her free hand. She rushed with him out of the glare and had the momentary impression that the car was following them. But she was at the side when Charles pulled up.

His jaw had dropped as he gazed at Wink, she noticed, and when he could bring himself to say anything his receding chin seemed weaker than ever.

"What—what is this?"

"I'll explain it in a little while, Charles," she said to calm him. "Let me and Wink get into the car."

"You're bringing the kid along?"

"Of course."

"But look here," he said reasonably, "if the kid's people don't know he's out, and I can't believe they'd let him stay awake so late, there's a nasty word for what you're doing. That word is—"

"I know what the word is." Not for the first time, Kay wished he wouldn't choose to make everything excessively plain. "I'll tell you the ins and outs of it as soon as we get into the car and away from here."

"But, Kay, I didn't come out this far to be an accomplice in a kidn-—"

Kay reached over and opened the car door, then gestured Wink into the rear seat and placed herself next to him. Charles seemed fascinated by the sight of the boy, glancing at him through the driver's mirror.

Wink suddenly said, "I want to sit in front."

Kay began patiently, "Just a moment, dear."

"But I *always* sit in front."

Charles' voice was icy. "Put him up here, Kay, by all means, if it'll stop the complaining."

Holding tightly to the flying saucer in his hands, Wink clambered to the front seat. He looked around in dissatisfaction at the driver's panel.

"Haven't you got a radio?"

Charles answered, "I don't have any need for one, if it's just the same to you."

"Every car ought'a have a radio," Wink pronounced. "There's a lot of music on radio, and that's very good for the nerves. Makes you feel better."

"As of the last few minutes, young fellow," Charles said, "I'm starting to agree with you."

Through gritted teeth Kay asked, "Will you please start driving into town?"

Charles started the Volks in a manner that Wink approved; one more negative comment from the boy might have resulted in having him and Kay thrown out of the car. Kay doubted if there had ever been a kidnapping (that was the truthful word for it) like this one. Not too long a time would pass before Wink was going to have to relieve himself, no doubt, and the getaway timetable would be interrupted for that.

Charles didn't allow her to do much thinking, no matter how trivial. As soon as he had turned on the road he asked:

"What is it that you want to tell me, Kay?"

"You're entitled to know, of course, Charles; and it's time Wink heard the truth, too. Wink's life will be in danger as long as he stays at Storm House. There have already been several attempts to kill him, and more of them are likely to be made unless he's out of there and in a place where he can be protected."

Wink sat rigidly as if he had been frozen in place. His mouth was wide open. He tightened his grip on the flying saucer toy; perhaps it represented stability to him.

Charles asked, "What does his guardian say about all this?"

Kay blinked. "How do you happen to know that Rolf is his only guardian? It isn't what you'd call a matter of general knowledge."

"Storm mentioned it on that night when he came to see you," Charles said impatiently but carefully. "I was there and I heard most of it."

Kay frowned, trying to recall what Rolf had said on

that occasion. "He told me that he and his sister live with the child, but I'd swear he didn't say anything about—"

"Somebody else must've told it to me later, then. I've been curious about Storm House ever since I heard that you'd gone to work there. Besides, what difference does it make how I heard it?"

He was right again, of course.

"I still don't know," Charles added thoughtfully, "how Rolf Storm feels about these murder attempts."

"He thinks that there won't be any more. He thinks that a dangerous lunatic was trying to kill Wink and that the man died in a last attempt."

"What part of that statement don't you agree with?"

"If a rich child is being attacked over a period of time, Charles, there's more involved than aberration. Somebody with that sort of kink could simply find another child who's an easier target."

She saw Wink's back stiffening at the words, and he looked around wonderingly at Kay. He was too well-bred to interrupt a talk between grown-ups, but she could sense the fresh tautness at the repeated statement of his life being in danger.

Charles, his attention on the road, was obviously feeling a different sort of wonder.

"And that's why you're taking the child away from his home? Because you've got this theory of yours?"

"Yes."

"Don't you realize, Kay, that you're risking a considerable number of chips on this theory?"

"It's common sense, not just a theory."

"You can't expect a maniac to think according to your common sense," Charles pointed out. "Suppose this fellow has a compulsion to kill blond eight-year-old boys. They may not be easy to find, you know. Or maybe he can't stand to put up with failures and he hates to have missed on his previous trys."

Charles suddenly cleared his throat.

"I should say hat*ed,*" he remarked. "The man is dead now, according to the news story I saw; your name has certainly been appearing in the Garden *Eagle* pretty often in the last few weeks, what with your suspension from school and all. The fellow was called Breithaupt, as I recall. Waldemar Breithaupt."

"Yes, that's right."

"Well, to go along with your notion a little further, Kay, who do you think really wants to kill this child?"

"I think it's somebody who hired Breithaupt. What's more, I think it's the person who inherits Wink's money."

"And who would that be, according to your particular theory, Kay?"

"Wink's mother had a distant relative, Rolf tells me. *He* says it's an older woman who wouldn't make an attempt at murder."

"Why not believe what he says?" Charles asked reflectively.

"For the simple reason that there's a motive and only one person stands to get the money if anything happens to Wink. Who else could be so patient over a long period of time when it comes to killing a child?"

"Oh, I can think of somebody else." The back of his head was raised and lowered forcefully as he nodded to make the point clear to himself. "At least one other person has got a solid motive, Kay."

"Who?" She wasn't surprised that Charles, with his faculty for simplifying matters, should be the one who sensed a truth that had been evading her. "In heaven's name, Charles, who else is there?"

He paused to take a right turn with more precision than strictly necessary, and seemed to have a second thought on the subject of their conversation by the time he was again comparatively relaxed.

"There's no point in complicating this by bringing it up at this very minute."

"Charles, will you for heaven's sake tell me what's on your mind?"

"No, I don't think I will," he said calmly. "You're too upset as it is."

"What has that got to do with anything?"

"If I tell you who else has got a very good murder motive it's likely to disturb you so much that you'll make this ride even more uncomfortable, if such a thing is possible."

Wink sat looking from one to the other, an edge of the flying saucer held firmly between his teeth. He seemed to have drawn himself against the door as if he wanted to make himself less noticeable. As far as Kay could tell, glancing worriedly at him, he seemed wary and stunned but he wasn't a bit frightened.

They reached the highway, well-lit at this patch and being travelled by relatively few cars. Charles' headlights picked out a boulder, a sign marked FALLING ROCK ZONE, a fence railing made out of wood and a sandwich bag on the ground; then swerved with the car to search out nearby traffic in front of it.

Charles was swearing under his breath at other drivers, especially at somebody coming towards them with headlights out. He tried to warn the other people and even shouted, but it was no use. A driver proceeding too slowly down the middle lane woke his ire, too, but not as strongly.

"Charles," she asked cautiously, "do you believe what I've been telling you?"

"Slow drivers cause big pile-ups and telescope crashes," he muttered. "They ought to be run off the road or put on bicycles."

"Charles!"

"What? What is it?"

"I want to know if you believe what I've been telling you about what you call my theory."

"I'm sure you think it's true, Kay, but I doubt every word of it."

"Then your notion about who else might want to harm Wink doesn't have any belief back of it, either."

"I think that the fellow what's-his-name is the only one who wanted to harm the child, yes. But if I were to accept your theory, as I said before, I can imagine somebody else who would be very interested in knocking the kid off."

She winced at his brutal language. "If that's the case, Charles," she asked, "where are you taking us? And why?"

It caught him unawares. For one of the few times since she had known Charles Bundy, he didn't answer a particular question in detail.

"I'm taking you for a little ride, Kay," he said, picking the words as if he was dictating a telegram. "I came out this far in the first place because you wanted to talk to me, so I'm giving you a chance to talk."

A highway light briefly stabbed her eyes. "But why do you want to get involved any further? You yourself said that what I'm doing amounts to kidnapping the boy."

"Let me put it like this, Kay. I'm hoping that I'll be able to bring you to your senses."

"But why do you take the trouble? All you have to do is turn the car around and drive back to where you picked up me and Wink. Or you can pull over and drop us off right here."

"No, I don't think I can drop you two off at this particular point," Charles said. "The child would certainly be able to identify me and I might be in some trouble as an accessory to what you've done."

"Then you should bring us back to the house and tell the Storms exactly what happened. They're wealthy and influential people, Charles, and I'm sure that they could do you some good in your career."

"I've thought of all those things," he snapped.

"What keeps you from doing one of them?"

"I'm beginning to feel convinced," Charles said

quietly, almost conversationally, "that you'd be a lot better off, Kay, if you didn't ask so many questions."

Wink had detected the grimness in Charles' quiet tone. He pulled an edge of the flying saucer toy out of his mouth and gazed with wide questioning eyes at Charles; but he spoke to the person he trusted.

"Where's he bringing us, Miss Campb- —?"

He didn't finish the sentence. Charles, taking his attention from the road for only a short time, turned to the right and raised a hand. It chunked against the boy's left cheek, sending the small body off-balance and against the padded back of the car seat.

"That's just for openers. William, if you do much more talking," Charles Bundy said in the same quiet conversational tone he'd used with Kay a moment ago. "Every time you open your mouth from now on you'll get exactly the same treatment. Just remember from now on, William: one word, one sock."

William.

He had called the child by his true name. Even if Rolf Storm had mentioned it in passing several weeks ago, there wasn't any reason for Charles to remember such a trivial detail; unless, of course, there was some reason she didn't fully understand as yet.

But one thing she knew. One piece of knowledge seemed to have crawled into her consciousness and wouldn't be pried out. The certainty that now confronted her could only be faced with a sense of mounting horror: she had spent considerable care and ingenuity only to bring the child within reach of the man who wanted to murder him.

Eighteen

"I CAN SEE you from the driver's mirror," Charles said, his tone of voice surprisingly unchanged. He was the same quietly dressed man, gray at the temples, that she had known for such a long time. Outwardly at least, he was the rising young executive type, a man who was ambitious and sincere. He'd be perfectly capable of going back to his previous life of fraternizing with more important executives, working overtime at the bank and hurrying home just before the eleven o'clock news was going to be seen on television.

"I can sense that you're doing some heavy thinking," he added. "Would you like to tell me what's on your mind? No? Would you rather I took a guess?"

Kay didn't answer.

"I'm sure it's occurred to you that there really is somebody else with a motive to do what we've been talking about. And I'm pretty sure you know who that somebody else is."

"Why?" she asked hoarsely. "What makes you want to do it?"

"The best motive in the world, Kay," he said. "Money."

"How can you possibly hope to inherit?"

"It's an odd thing about being successful," Charles said thoughtfully. "The world tells you that success is the desired goal in living, but not that you should be honest or upright in getting what the world approves. Which means, if you follow me, Kay, that it's perfectly all right to foreclose on the widow and orphan or keep the factory from becoming unionized. Of course you can use a very small percentage of the extra profits to turn yourself into a patron of the arts and make some

contributions to well-known charities. Then you can talk about free enterprise being stifled by government interference with business, and you'll have quite a forum for what you say. You'll be accepted, a solid citizen, a member of the community in good standing.

"That's what I want, Kay, to be a member of the community in good standing. It needs money to make some shrewd investments, and that's the money I'm planning to get."

She couldn't help saying, "But you don't inherit a penny if something happens to the child."

"Not directly, but—oh, oh!"

The highway at this section was badly lighted, and Charles slowed down in order to drive more carefully. A car could be seen in the distance, but Kay knew she'd not be able to give any sign of distress. Every car was like an apartment in some ways, or like a very small traveling community. The public highway could give a considerable amount of privacy, even when that was undesirable.

Lost in her thoughts as she was, Kay felt startled as the car pulled over to a side and came to a halt. Charles kept the motor running and flicked off the lights.

"I'm still watching you in the mirror, Kay," he said mildly. "If you try to hurt me, I give you my word I'll take it out immediately on the child over here. I hope we understand each other."

"Y-yes."

"But I don't think you'll want to do me any harm at all, Kay. I've got an interesting suggestion to make, and I really think you'll appreciate it."

He leaned forward in the seat, glancing out and around. After giving a nod of satisfaction, he resumed his study of Kay in the mirror.

"As soon as William is out of the way I'll be in control of a lot of money—if not as soon, to be strictly accurate, not long afterwards. The two of us can link

up, Kay, and become a team. How do you feel about it?"

As much as she wanted to say that she'd never go along with such an idea, she knew that it would be much wiser to stall for time.

Carefully she said, "I have to give it some thought."

There was a gasp from Wink. Kay forced herself not to look at the child, knowing as she did that he must feel as if all the ground beneath him had suddenly given way. To look at him would be as good as telling Charles how she genuinely felt about his proposal of marriage renewed under such gruesome circumstances.

"You haven't got much time to think," Charles said coolly. "You may be wondering if you can just simply go along with what I say and then run to the police. Well, Kay, if you agree to my particular plan, you simply won't be able to go to the police now or at any other time. Is this clear?"

"Perfectly."

"Can I count on you?"

"I need a little time to think it—"

"There's no time. You have to say yes or no and do it right now."

Kay saw no choice in the matter. She would need to improvise by the moment.

"Yes," she whispered.

There was a gasp from the child's mouth. At first Kay thought that he was expressing bitter disappointment, but then she saw that Charles had dropped an arm across his slim waist and was pulling him towards the door closest to the driver's seat.

"Come out this way and don't give me any trouble," he said and opened the door. "You can go out the other way, dear."

It was the almost absent-minded term of affection that tempted Kay to turn on him instantly no matter how bad the risk. But she realized that as long as he

held the boy there could be no question as to who was calling the shots.

It was chilly out here. There was a dirt track past the end of the highway and a sturdy wooden fence before a sheer drop. In the darkness, Kay couldn't guess how large a drop it might be. Charles carried the boy in one arm over to the area of the fence and then turned to wait for Kay.

She could probably escape him if she decided to run. Logically, too, Charles would almost certainly let the child go and leave town rather than commit a crime that could very easily be pinned on him in the future by Kay's testimony in a courtroom.

All she had to do was to turn around and run. She'd be saving herself and, indirectly, saving the child.

But Charles had raised Wink and was holding him easily on the top step of the wooden fence, a slim frightened figure against a background of total darkness. The child must have known as well as Kay did that death waited for him below.

Charles had shrewdly figured out exactly which move on his part would bring Kay over. Without hesitation (the thought of leaving had come and been weighed so swiftly that she wasn't slowed up) Kay walked off the road to the dirt and the fence where Charles waited, his eyes having followed her.

"I assume, Kay, that you're in my corner," he said pleasantly. "Is that right?"

"Yes, it is."

"In that case, I'm sure you won't mind proving it."

She was aware of a chill passing through her as if there was no skin covering between her insides and the fresh air.

"Proving it how?"

"Very simply. I'll let go of the child, you see. All you have to do, Kay, is to push him."

She would've expected to become frightened or pro-

tective or to launch an attack on Charles. But she was in such good control of herself that she was aware of the rain-washed smell of earth below and peculiar clammy smell of wet wood at chest level to her.

Knowledge that would have chilled her only a few minutes ago left her calm at this time. Without having to be told clearly Kay realized that Charles had been lying to her when he talked about their being married in the future. No doubt Charles was intending to make it easier for himself to kill Kay and the child. As soon as she tried to save her own life by pushing the child over, he would simply raise her by the ankles and push her down below to join Wink. Then he'd get back into his modest little car and drive away.

Back in town he would read about the accident in the Garden *Eagle*. Maybe some hard-working reporter would come to him for an interview.

"Kay was very fond of children," he would probably say a little pompously. "I assume that she was trying to kidnap that poor boy, having convinced herself that it would be the best thing for him, and that the two of them were 'hitching' a ride when the accident happened. She must have told the poor boy some story or other to get him to go along; I'll never believe that a girl like Kay Campbell would use force against a child."

The reporter would thank him for the interview. Charles would say that he was glad to do his bit and walk with the reporter to the door of his office, repeating what he had already said.

So clear was the scene in Kay's mind that she was taken by surprise to hear him tell her:

"I'm about to let go of him."

"Wait!"

"Well, Kay? What is it now?"

"There's one thing you haven't explained yet."

It startled him, as she had guessed it would, to be

told that he, of all people, hadn't made himself completely clear about some point.

"Nonsense," he snapped.

"You were going to tell me how you can hope to get Wink's money when I know perfectly well that you aren't the heir."

His eyes searched her face. "Kay, I think you're stalling for time."

"Nonsense, I couldn't be! Who's going to help the child now? And besides, I'm in your corner, Charles. You should know that. But I admit I'm curious to find out the answer to what I asked you."

He smiled tiredly at her. "It's my mother who inherits," he said. "My mother was a distant relative of William's mother, and as soon as the money is handed over it'll be Charlie who's in control of it."

He sounded almost regretful, as if his mother's genealogy had let him in for so much trouble by forcing him to hire Waldemar Breithaupt for a series of murder attempts which had finally failed and was now impelling him to do the job himself. And to murder Kay subsequently, as well.

Kay remembered listening to Charles' mother on the phone. Mrs. Bundy had said that she wouldn't live at Storm House "no matter what". Come to think of it, she had referred to the house as "the Storm place", which took a certain familiarity with the surroundings and the people for granted.

"Well, Kay, now that I've soothed your curiosity it's time for you to do what I wanted. Either you push the kid down before I count to five or I'm going to do it myself, and I'll know who's in my corner and who isn't."

"Charles, before you—"

"One!"

She chattered desperately, "There has to be some other way for you—"

"Two!"

"Charles, if we go through with it I'm afraid that we're going to be found out."

"It'll look like an accident—three!—and we can wait a year or so before we get married."

"But there's no statute of limitations on murder, Charles. Even in twenty-five years from now, the police could still arrest us."

"I give you my word, Kay, that you don't have to worry about what will happen in twenty-five years from now. Four! Here goes."

Kay hurriedly put an arm around the boy's midriff. She could feel his shaky breaths, and the waves of terror that flooded his body were communicated to her fingers.

"Do it now," he called out, stepping back of her. "Now, Kay!"

"Charles, give me just one more minute to tell you why—"

She knew what was on his mind as plainly as if he had told her. He was going to bend over and pitch both of them down the cliff, the child in Kay's arms. It would look as if Kay had lifted Wink to show him the view, and an unfortunate accident had happened.

"Charles, you mustn't do this," she called, gripping the child more tightly with one hand as she clasped the wet wood with the other.

It was Wink who acted now. With Kay holding him protectively he raised the toy flying saucer and hurled it with all his might at Charles.

It caught him on the right side of his head, a glancing blow; but not enough to do him any serious harm. His lips parted in a wicked grin as he stooped over.

"Hold on to him, Kay," he said thinly. "Just for a second now, don't let him go."

Only in a vague fashion did she know what happened afterwards. She did understand in a general way, when

she was told about it later on, that Charles must have been so preoccupied in watching Kay through the driver's mirror that he hadn't noticed any car following him from the distance.

Kay was aware of bright harsh light picking out the three of them like a whiplash laid across all their backs. A nerve-jabbing screech of sound was followed by car doors opening and men running out and toward them.

Already numb with shock, Kay took it calmly that Bert Gibson, the handyman at Storm House, left the car from the driver's side and hurried toward Charles. The other man followed Bert. His gleaming red hair gave away his identity. It was State Police Lieutenant Crisp, a gun in his hand.

There was a third man whose face she couldn't see, but it was this one who hurried toward Kay and the child. He was literally too close for Kay to make him out, and she knew that the repeated shocks had made her dizzy and that her eyes couldn't quite focus.

Charles had started running down the road, but hadn't gone more than half a dozen steps when Lieutenant Crisp was upon him. Kay could hear the sharp, short, merciless thudding of punches. There was a very hard one suddenly, and it doubled Charles up at the same time as he fell backward. His body slid between the fence barriers. Through bleary eyes Kay caught a glimpse of one of his hands reaching frantically toward wood, then vanishing from sight. There was a shout, then, but it was mercifully short. A sound like knitting needles clacking could be heard from below, and then the silence was complete.

Kay tried to keep from imagining what must be going on not so far from her. She took a step backward, surprised that the boy's weight hadn't been apparent as she moved him off the fence. That was when she realized her left hand was empty.

This knowledge proved too much for her. She swayed

and felt herself falling forward in the direction of the fence. She might very well have gone through the barrier just as Charles had done. The third man, the one she couldn't see, now did her a disservice; he saved her life. His hands were set gently and firmly around her and she felt him easing her to the ground. There was something foolish about not being able to do what her body wanted, and she was no longer able to give it any commands. The battle against unconsciousness was a losing one, and she didn't feel sorry when it was finished.

Nineteen

SHE REVIVED in a room with barred windows, white walls, yellow-white furniture and a portable curtain at the right of the opened door. As soon as Kay saw the curtain she knew she was in a hospital room.

She sighed, and wished she hadn't come back to consciousness so soon. She would be getting out of this hospital in a short time, and then she'd have to go through the rest of her life in the knowledge of what she had done to the child.

The man who had saved her life had done something hateful.

Her changed breathing must have been transmitted by public address system to another room. She was still blinking her eyes to get used to the sunlight when a starched and cheerful young nurse came running in.

"Don't worry about a thing, dear," the young nurse said. "Everything is all right."

"Wink," she said emptily. "Wink."

"Of course, dear," the nurse smiled. Kay half-expected her to close one eye briefly, but she didn't. "Now we're going to have a few tests to find out what shape we're in, and then everything will be all right."

A doctor arrived shortly, asked her some questions, and gave her as thorough an examination as she'd had in years. Toward the end of it she could see that his interest was slacking off, which seemed to prove that there wasn't anything much wrong with her.

Not physically, at any rate.

To her own surprise she ate breakfast and would have asked for a second cup of coffee if the stuff hadn't been made so badly. She caught herself wondering whether the coffee in all hospitals was such miserable stuff as this, and then thought that she had no business to consider anything else except the fate of the child.

When the young nurse came back to collect Kay's breakfast dishes, it was hard for her to ask:

"Have they found him yet?"

"Found who, dear?"

"Wink, of course. *I* let him fall over that cliff. It was my fault."

"Now, dear, we can't let ourselves go to pieces. We're always tempted to do just exactly that at first, but we have to control it. Besides, we have a visitor and I'm sure it's somebody interesting."

Kay's mind leaped to the conclusion she hoped for.

"It's the child, isn't it? He's all right."

The nurse gave a superior smile. "Why don't we put on some make-up, dear, and then see for ourselves? I'll let him in as soon as I get rid of these things. I want to make sure we won't get too emotional, so I'll come back with him in a while, dear."

Kay's purse was on a chair beside the bed. She withdrew a pocket mirror from it and made emergency repairs. The nurse glanced in to see if the repairs had been concluded, then returned in a moment with Rolf Storm.

"You look disappointed," he said, sitting down on the chair beside her bed. "I've been waiting up all night to see you and I must admit I'm a little shocked by the reaction."

"I—I'm sorry. I know what you want to see me about, really, and I couldn't help what happened to Wink."

"I'm sure you've done the best you could," he agreed smoothly. "When you were brought to Kinnina General Hospital, Bert tells me, you were in pretty bad shape. It's nice to see that there's some color in your face now. You look human."

"I don't deserve any sympathy." She wished Wink looked human instead of having been dashed to pieces on a cliff because of her negligence.

"I suppose you want to know what the prognosis in your case is," he said. "You'll be here for a day or two, at least, if only to get a little relaxation. You've been in a bad state of nerves, I'm afraid. Part of it is my fault, heaven knows, but not all of it."

She waited for him to say something more about that, but he shook his head as if to clear it and smiled engagingly at her.

"About last night," he told her. "What happened is really very simple, you know. Lieutenant Crisp came back to Storm House for his wife (the call that had taken him out was only the result of a bad connection to the house and didn't involve his work in any way), and he joined on the trip to get Wink. It was obvious that you had taken him somewhere, and Crisp knew that Bundy drove a red Volks; so he was able to look out for it. The car was tracked down. The rest of it, as the saying goes, is history."

His flippancy may have been disturbing, but what he had just said was a genuine puzzler.

"How do you mean that he knew what kind of a car Charles drove? This doesn't make too much sense, unless you aren't telling me the whole truth. I know perfectly well that you're trying to spare my feelings about what I did to Wink, but you should certainly tell me the truth about everything else."

"I'm liable to give you a little talk on the nature and

meaning of truth," Rolf Storm said, smiling agreeably. "Never mind, though. But I would certainly expect you to thank me."

"For what?"

"For saving your life," he said.

Kay blinked. "Were you the extra man, the one who did that? Well, I'd thank you if I didn't feel so—just a minute! You were at home and drunk last night. I saw you on the stairs. You were going to take some of that LSD of yours, and I never knew you to say you were going to take it and not do what you said."

Rolf told her thoughtfully, "I can see that I'm going to have to explain everything from the start. I'll make it as short as I can, if that's any consolation."

"I don't understand what you're talking about."

"Give me a few minutes and I'll make it very clear."

He ran a hand through his dark hair to help him gather his thoughts. Not till he did that did Kay consciously notice that it was daylight. A ray of sun had fallen across his hand. He pushed back the chair to give himself more shade rather than close the metallic blinds here in Kay's room.

"I told you that I'd had an investigation done on the woman who inherited if anything bad were to happen to Wink. The woman was all right, but her son seemed worth taking trouble to investigate further. He wasn't directly responsible for the attempts, but he was the logical suspect to be master-minding them. My detectives found out what there was to know about him, including the name of his girl friend."

"Me?"

"Exactly. When you lost your job, my detectives said that here was a golden chance to fix Bundy's wagon once and for all. I went to hire you, absolutely convinced that you would help Charles Bundy try to get the dirty work done, and the blame was sure to be pinned exactly where it belonged."

Kay said thinly, "This is outrageous!"

"Let me finish, please. I didn't expect you to become so fond of the child. In fact, I didn't realize that you're probably the last known exponent of unselfishness in human relations—no, I'm not going to get onto that tack again, Kay. I'm just mentioning it."

"Tell me what you have to," Kay said, closing her eyes. "I've suddenly become very tired."

"There isn't much more. Another attempt was made against the child on the day you came to Storm House to be interviewed. At the time it did seem like an odd coincidence, but Bert Gibson is under the impression that Arlene, the maid, helped with that job. She's never been very popular with men, as I understand it, and Bert expects his co-workers in Albany to find out that she'd been getting a lot of attention from Waldemar Breithaupt, so she'd—oh, I didn't tell you about Bert Gibson, did I? Bert is a member of a big detective agency, and he was sent to me to keep an eye on Wink."

Kay nodded slowly. The muscular and fast-moving Bert Gibson did seem, when she considered it, like a man who could have done detective work very well.

"He made a point of whetting your curiosity so that you'd want to get the job, and Bert and I settled down to wait and watch."

"You couldn't watch," Kay pointed out. "You were more likely than not to be full of that stuff you were always taking."

"Our system was very simple," Rolf said. "I'd go up to my room and bring out a pair of binoculars. If I saw anything near the house that was worth investigating I'd phone Bert in the garage and he would look into it."

Kay was open-mouthed. "You never took that stuff at all? You were faking?"

"That's right," he said, nodding. "I *am* an artist by profession, Kay, and by no means a bad one. But I certainly wouldn't work under the influence of a drug.

I've been told that I'm a free-and-easy guy and I suppose I am, Kay, but believe me I'd never want to spoil my work."

"Then you were out to trap me," Kay said carefully. "The whole point of it was to trap me."

"Well, to have you inadvertently help get the evidence against Charles Bundy," Rolf admitted.

"And there was no truth in whatever you said to me during that time," Kay remarked. "You were playing a part."

"I couldn't be sure what kind of a woman you really were," he admitted. "You sounded like a wonder and you behaved very well toward the boy, but I knew that you'd been Charles Bundy's girl friend and you might be trying to divert suspicion from yourself. That's why I had to 'play a part', as you call it."

"Why did your detective keep me from watching the boy through opera glasses? I started to do just that on the day before yesterday and he told me not to."

"Bert was afraid that you might swing the glasses around to face the house and see me looking through the window curtains with my binoculars."

Kay asked bitterly, "How do you know I wasn't Charles' accomplice all along? I certainly brought Wink to him."

"You were acting in good faith," Rolf said. "Bert had a wiretap arrangement on all the phones and he heard you talk to a girl friend who suggested using Charles Bundy and his car for what you felt had to be done."

"So you knew exactly what I was up to," Kay said, flushing.

"Yes. I have to admit that seeing you in the house when I was on my way upstairs to get dressed for tracking you down was one of the worst surprises I've ever had in my life. I had to act even more drunk than I'd been acting up till then, and I did my best to be repulsive."

"I shouldn't think you'd have needed to try very hard," Kay murmured. "And I'm still convinced that you've got no way of knowing I wasn't Charles' accomplice all along. I did take Wink to him and I lost—I couldn't *help* losing—"

She was unable to finish what she'd been going to say.

Rolf stared, wide-eyed. "Do you honestly think you hurt the child? I was going to tell you that even if the phone calls hadn't convinced us about your innocence, there was very solid evidence in your favor. Eyewitness evidence, in fact. Hold on and I'll show you."

He left the room and came back in a few minutes with Wink. The boy was dressed in his "good" suit and looked shy and weary, but he slipped his hand out of Rolf's and walked by himself to the foot of Kay's bed.

"Hello, Miss Campbell," he said, smiling tentatively. "I hope you'll be better soon."

"Thank you, dear." Kay would have liked to hug him and actually held out her hands in his direction. But he wouldn't come closer. Wink was apparently at a stage of masculine development in which he found emotional displays decidedly unpleasant.

Rolf said to the boy, "Miss Campbell is going to be back at work by the day after tomorrow at the latest, Wink."

The boy interrupted before Kay could put in any comment of her own.

"I *hate* that name," he said.

His emotion took Rolf as much by surprise as his remark did.

" 'Wink', you mean? You don't like that?"

"It's a kid's name, and I'm not a kid."

He might as well have added that after what had happened to him last night he didn't think of himself as a baby any longer.

"I see," Rolf said, nodding. "It looks as if I saved a child's life last night when I pulled you off that fence,

and now I find out that I've got a young man on my hands. What would you like to be called?"

"My name is William."

"That's a man's name, and you don't qualify for those exalted precincts as yet. I've heard Bert call you Billy, though, and I guess that'll be good enough. Eventually you'll be known as Bill and then, if you want to be, as William."

"All right," the temporarily-named Billy agreed.

Rolf asked Kay, "Is there anything we can get for you before we leave?"

"No," Kay said. "Thanks very much."

"I'll drop back in the afternoon," he told her. "Get some rest while you can. There'll be plenty of work ahead of you with Billy."

"No," Kay said again, looking away from both of them. "I'd give anything to keep on working with Wi-—Billy, but I can't go back to Storm House after having been suspected of—of what you thought. It's impossible for me to go back."

Rolf's face twisted as if with pain. "I'm not trying to push you around, Kay, against your will, but you have to reconsider this. At least give it some more thought, for heaven's sake."

"I've given it as much thought as I can." Kay shook her head firmly, then realized how tired she was. "Tell your sister she's won. I'll be at Storm House in a few days to pack my things."

Twenty

KAY'S NEXT glimpse of Storm House came after two more days had passed. She was in the Chevvy which Rolf Storm had insisted on using to take her back. The house could be seen through the grove of trees, the

white two-story house that looked from here as if it was all white brick and there wasn't a window in sight.

Rolf drove the car into the garage on the other end of the hill and away from the road. She led the way up the pebble-shelled path from the outbuilding to the rear of the house without looking to her left or right.

A bouquet of roses had been put on the bed table in her room, and the card with it offered best wishes from Mrs. Eagan, the cook, and from Bert Gibson. Arlene, the maid suspected of having given some help to Waldemar Breithaupt, had been summarily dismissed.

Rolf, sad-eyed, watched as Kay deftly began putting her clothes into the fold-over suitcase.

"So your mind is really made up about leaving," he said. "I was hoping you might have been thinking it over and decided against it."

"I haven't."

"Well, it's one argument I'm sorry I won."

"Argument about what?"

"Unselfish love," he said. "I was hoping that there was enough of it in you to overlook what I felt had to be done during the last few weeks."

"There isn't," Kay said flatly. "You've won the argument. I'm selfish and cruel."

"There's no warm feeling in you for a grownup," he said. "Only for a child who is satisfied with an outward show of affection and doesn't make any powerful demands."

"If that's what you think about children, Rolf, you don't know them very well. And I can't see any reason for you to be analyzing me again. It won't get either of us anything at all. So if you let me go on with my packing I'll be very much obliged."

"Kay, I had promised myself that I wouldn't try to change your mind if it was made up, but I can't help myself. You belong here with me and the boy."

She couldn't have put a name to the feeling that welled up within her at those words.

"And Jessica?" she asked lightly. "Do I belong here with your sister?"

"I assume that if Billy and I are determined to have you stay, Jessica will either see reason or move out."

"She could never leave Storm House."

"Some arrangement would be worked out, given the time and determination. From now on, I'm really determined about this."

Boldly Kay asked, "Why are you set on having me remain here?"

"It's possible that I think the time has arrived for Storm House to take on a more normal atmosphere."

"I don't know what you mean."

"This house should be lived in and controlled by a married couple who will have children of their own."

Kay's heart thudded. "You're not seriously proposing marriage now, are you?"

"Not at the moment," he agreed. "I am proposing that we get to know each other quite well, and then we can decide about each other. We've started very badly."

"What makes you think that I could be the woman you'd want to marry? Are you so convinced that I'm unselfish? Believe me, I can be selfish and arrogant and stubborn and mean."

"I'm inclined not to believe a word of that," Rolf said. "But even if it were the truth you wouldn't be a miserable wretch all the time. You're bound to turn back into the Kay Campbell I know and—as I say, the Kay Campbell I know. If you're the girl I like for a greater proportion of the time than you're a mean witch, then I'd say that marriage between us would be likely to work out."

"You're assuming that *you* don't have any bad habits."

"I'm sure I haven't got the ones you think," he remarked firmly. "That's my point, you see, Kay. I know

you better by far than you know me, and I want you to start all over again and get to know me very well."

"But what makes you certain," Kay asked softly, "that I'm the person you want me to be?"

"When a man knows that a woman is capable of love, he's learned something vital about her nature," Rolf said, looking deep into Kay's eyes. "And perhaps the woman will give some of that love to another human being. I think she will do just that under the right conditions and for a long period of time. All I'm suggesting is that we try to know each other. Either that, or we always wonder what would've happened if we had tried."

Kay stopped packing and set a pair of stockings down on the bed next to her suitcase. She was under the impression that what she'd done was an act of great importance for herself and her future.

She couldn't say a word. Rolf filled the silence gravely.

"I think that Storm House will be all the better for it, too," he said. "Nobody'll be claiming that the house is good or evil in itself. After all, what happened to Billy took place outside the grounds; and from now on, if you agree to stay, he'll be leading a normal life. I think that Storm House's reputation has outlived its usefulness to people."

"Was it ever useful?" She could talk to Rolf about any subject except that of her feelings toward him.

"People like to believe in the supernatural," he pointed out. "But I'm pretty sure that the legend of Storm House isn't going to hold up worth a damn after what's happened recently, which shows that good can come out of evil."

"I suppose so."

"Another inducement for thinking about good luck coming out of bad is that you and I have gotten to know each other at Storm House and we'll get to know

each other a lot better here. I think you realize as well as I do that we're going to spend a lot of time together."

He reached out a hand for her. Kay accepted it and held it lightly. Looking up at him, she knew that she was going to be with this man till the end of eternity.

Mrs. Eagan, the cook, was talking to the new maid. This girl's name was Sheila, but she wasn't Irish. She was a petulant but attractive dark-haired girl whose only concern at the moment appeared to be that the new job offered no chance for her to meet some eligible young men.

"Perhaps you're the fifteenth maid we've had since I've been here," Mrs. Eagan said, wiping her hands on a kitchen towel. "Most of 'em leave to get married."

"Out of fifteen girls," Sheila said sulkily, "most of 'em *would* leave to get married."

"Now, now, my girl," Mrs. Eagan growled. "Behave yourself and the good things will happen. Look at Miss Campbell, for instance. Came here under a cloud, she did; a schoolteacher who was going to be a governess. In my opinion she'll marry Mr. Rolf and be the next lady of Storm House."

"There was an eligible man when she came here."

"You could find yourself at Storm House with a basketball team and still not get a smile," Mrs. Eagan said portentously, "if the house is against you."

"Oh, baloney!" Sheila waved a hand to dismiss that. "I've heard about Storm House and I don't believe a single word of what they say."

"No? Well, do you happen to know what went on at this place only recently? A man setting foot in this house for the very first time was killed because the house knew he had come here for no good purpose."

"Do you believe that?" Sheila asked.

"Of course I do, my girl. And Master Billy's life was

saved along with Miss Campbell's for the very good reason that the house wasn't against them. In fact, it apparently turned on Mr. Rolf and hurt his hand."

"So what?"

"Because his hand was hurt, he left the room he was in at the time. He saw Miss Campbell leaving the house and went after her with some others and saved two lives. Storm House certainly has a will of its own, young lady. Never for a moment think that it doesn't."

"I was reading about that whole business in the papers, and they didn't say anything like that."

"Of course not, but how can anybody but a poor ignorant child believe different with the reputation of Storm House being what it is? I tell you, Sheila, that even people who were skeptical about Storm House before will turn into believers now. Why, there'll be tourist cars passing the house all day and night for month after month. You're working in a house that, for better or worse, is going to be famous forever."

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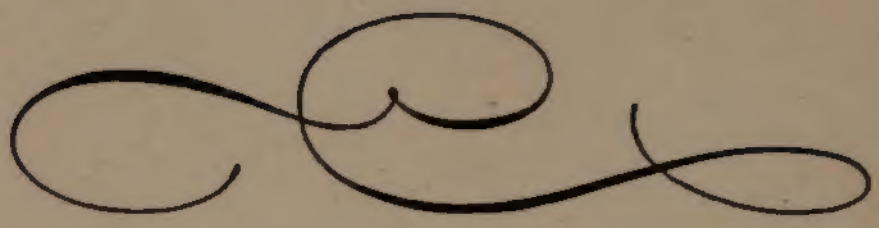

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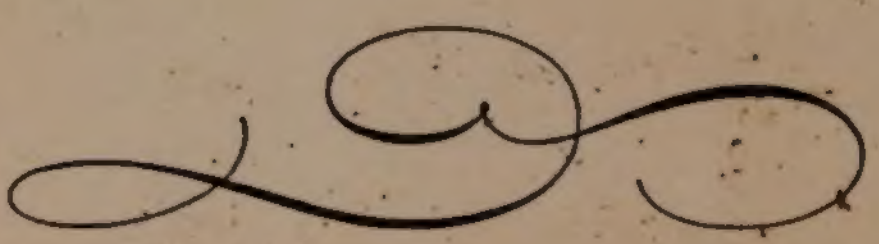

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